ANGELO GUICCIARDINI;

Bandit of the Alps.

A ROMANCE.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

BY SOPHIA FRANCES,

AUTHOR OF VIVONIO, CONSTANCE DE LINDENSDORF, AND THE NUN OF MISERICORDIA.

" ——————There is a power
Unseen that rules the illimitable world,
. . . .
While man, who madly deems himself the lord
Of all, is nought but weakness and dependence."

THOMSON.

" He seemed for dignity composed,
And high exploit: but——"

MILTON.

VOL. I.

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ANGELO GUICCIARDINI.

CHAP. I.

ON the delightful banks of the lake Maggiore, in the Milanese, was once situated the lonely, but rather elegant and spacious cottage of the Signora di Berlotti. Surrounded by a luxuriant garden and vineyard, which extended along the foot of the tall hill that sheltered it on one side, and concealed by groves of ancient and lofty chesnut-trees, that descended even to the very edge of the lake, this humble residence was impervious to the eye of the traveller; but it was well known to the neighbouring peasantry, as the abode of pious charity; and sometimes to the weary pilgrim, as the sacred retreat where hospitality loved to dispense the gifts which a liberal and compassionate spirit spared from a circumscribed fortune.

But, except the chance visitors above alluded to, the Signora di Berlotti's intercourse with society was extremely limited, as she never received on terms of intimacy

any persons but the superior of a small priory at no great distance from the cottage, and a person who usually paid her a short visit once in the space of two years. It was not, therefore, surprising that, after a residence of some years in this retired cot, that the signora was as little known as on her first arrival there.

Herself, a lovely child, her daughter, and two domestics, were now the sole inhabitants of the cottage. On the signora's first fixing her abode there, the household had, however, consisted of three servants; but the person who acted as housekeeper, having married and quitted her service, the signora did not think proper to replace her; but endeavoured to dissipate a secret melancholy which preyed on her own spirits, by superintending some of the domestic concerns herself. The education of her daughter, however, formed her principal and most pleasing occupation.

The young Cecilia di Berlotti, whose dawning excellencies seemed to promise the completion of every hope which fond maternal love could form, possessed all that gentleness, docility, and intelligence of disposition, which not only rendered her a most ready pupil, but also made her capable of diverting and soothing the sorrows of her parent.

At the period when this lovely girl had nearly reached her sixteenth year, but few traces of woe were observable in the striking features of the Signora di Ber-

lotti, except when at times her piercing eyes were rivetted on the beautiful countenance of Cecilia, and then, indeed, her looks seemed to express the most keen and afflictive emotions.

But these instances were rare, and never occurred but when in guarded and obscure terms she spoke of what might be the future destiny of this beloved and amiable child: but whatever the signora might feel in these moments of anxiety and dread, her emotions could not be more painful than those which her distress excited in the artless bosom of the object of her cares by such a conduct. Cecilia was herself as little acquainted with her mother's rank in life, or former connexions, as were any of the inhabitants of the banks of the lake; and could only conjecture that her revered parent must have moved in the higher circles, from the nature of the education bestowed upon herself. To the study of every elegant art and accomplishment, except that of dancing, Cecilia had been early devoted; not, however, to the exclusion of all that was useful; for if the amiable girl excelled in music, that charming science which so peculiarly distinguishes the natives of her country, and though her voice and musical performance were seldom, if ever equalled, she was also well acquainted with the best moral works in her own language, and those of several other countries, while her knowledge of every requisite domestic concern

was compleat: nor were her exquisite taste and talents for drawing inferior to those of some of the best masters.

Thus accomplished, Cecilia must have been an object of admiration to all who might have known her, had she even been deficient in beauty or grace; but her person was as perfect as the human form can be, and all the united charms of modesty, sensibility, ingenuousness and innocence, irradiated, with an expression almost celestial, the most lovely countenance. Much fairer than the generality of her countrywomen, her complexion was yet frequently tinted with the brightest carnation; while her dark auburn tresses half shaded a brow white as the lily of the desert, and flowed far below her shoulders in many a graceful wave. The perfect regularity of her features was not rendered uninteresting by that sameness which too often characterizes beauty; but every feeling of her soul was discernible in her mild, yet large dark eyes, which sometimes shone with all the animation of virtue, or were half robbed of their radiance by the soft stealing tears of pity and sympathy for the afflicted and the poor. Unconscious of the excellencies which distinguished her, Cecilia was unaffected in her manners, and sincerely pious; and if at times she heard her mother, impelled by admiration and wonder, vent an exclamation of rapture at her talents, the lovely girl found in such inadvertencies no food for vanity, but only a higher motive of

gratitude and love to that dear parent, whose forming hand had made her what she was. But Cecilia's instructions were not only received from the signora: the Father Ascollini was also an unwearied tutor to her in many studies, in which her mother must have failed; and his amiable pupil was, of course, well informed on subjects, on which she could fear few female competitors.

CHAP. II.

Cecilia had just attained her sixteenth year, when one evening, as the inhabitants of the little cot had just finished their simple supper, a young man, in the habit of a hunter, rushed suddenly into the room where the signora, her daughter, and the father Ascollini, then sat.

The appearance of the youth, whose figure was most strikingly interesting—his hurried voice, flushed cheek, and half-indignant, half-fearful manner—threw the whole party into surprise and dismay. All started up. Cecilia, retreatingly, clasped the hand of her mother; and the father Ascollini advanced a step forward; while the young man, in quick and agitated accents, besought shelter and concealment from some men who had pursued him from the edge of the wood that extended from

the hill, on the side of which the cottage stood, to the glen beneath.

"They cannot have perceived where I have taken refuge," he added; "for they were not in sight when I entered the cot; and they may perhaps pass on."

He was now interrupted by a loud knocking at the outward door. The look of anguished entreaty that he threw on the signora permitted her to hesitate no longer. "Cecilia," she exclaimed, "the recess." Cecilia needed not a repetition of this intimation of her mother's wishes: she looked at the young man to follow her, and quickly slipping aside a pannel in the wainscot of the apartment, glided through, followed by the young hunter, whom she conducted into a small circular stone room, and, after modestly whispering him to proceed along a narrow passage, the entrance of which she pointed out, returned by another way into the public part of the cottage, and re-entered the parlour, where she found three strangers, standing, conversing with the Father Ascollini, while the signora lay half-reclined on a couch, her veil wholly shading her features.

As Cecilia opened the door, one of the strangers, who was speaking, suddenly paused, and turned quickly round. She would have retreated; but the voice of her mother, faintly commanding her to remain, forbade her leaving the room.

The signora threw her veil aside, and beckoned her daughter to approach her.

Cecilia obeyed, while still a silence was preserved by the strangers, who gazed on her with the most earnest curiosity for a moment, which Ascollini perceiving, now attempted to divert their attention, by declaring that he knew not the object of their pursuit.

"Confound your jesuitical prevarication," now cried one of the men, in a rough voice: "we don't say that you know him; we only ask you whether you have *seen* such a fellow pass through your ground just now. But, by St. Peter, I believe I need not doubt much of his being here, when I see what might attract any man into this gloomy hut." And he looked at the trembling and alarmed Cecilia with a stare and a half smile which but too clearly evinced his meaning; and then throwing himself into a chair, demanded wine and other refreshments.

Guispardo and Lodelli, the two domestics, were now summoned by the Father Ascollini, and ordered to bring in what refreshments the house afforded.

The constrained indignation and but too apparent alarm of Ascollini struck unknown horrors to the mind of the innocent Cecilia. She sunk beside her mother on the sofa, but instantaneously felt sufficient cause to condemn her own want of fortitude; for the man, whose audacious speech had already so much terrified her, sprang up, and striding to the sofa,

clasped her hand in his, and, with a loud laugh, exclaimed :—

"Why, you silly fairy ! are you afraid of me ? Though I am a robber, I'm a man of honour ; and although I have entered your cot so roughly, you may trust to *my protection* henceforward. I give you my solemn promise, that I will respect your residence ; and remember, that *Angelo Guicciardini* pledges himself to befriend you while he lives."

The robber took off his cap, and pressed his lips to the shining scymeter he held in his hand. Cecilia gazed on him with silent awe and wonder. His tall and martial figure, arrayed in the hunter's garb, looked graceful, but gigantic : his belt was stuck with pistols and daggers ; and his commanding forehead, his dark locks being thrown aside, displayed a deep scar, while his large penetrating eyes seemed to express feelings which his air and rough-toned voice belied ; while in his manner and speech were strangely mixed manly dignity and apparently-assumed vulgarity.

"Surely this man is not what he would affect to be !" involuntarily thought Cecilia, as her timid but earnest glance rested for a moment on the robber, who, seeming to read a degree of rising confidence in her looks, said—

"Hem ! you think then that you may rest some hope on my word. Well—the *word* of a *robber*—do you hear, young

lady, the *word* of a *robber*——" and he laughed aloud.

Cecilia shrank back dismayed, abashed, and confounded at the strange facility with which she had in part believed the word of this singular man. She was afflicted and astonished at her having for a moment forgotten the delicacy and caution which ought to have distinguished her mind under such a circumstance. The deepest blush overspread her face; and she was reclining her head on the bosom of her agitated mother, when the robber, suddenly bending forward, again caught her arm: his hand trembled, and his deep-toned voice faltered, as he exclaimed—

"Look up!—once more, look up, and observe me attentively. Remember, 'tis the robber Angelo who commands you to mark well his features—those features that may one day be imprinted on your soul in characters of fire!"

Horror-struck and amazed, Cecilia felt irresistibly impelled to raise her eyes to the strongly marked features of Angelo. She expected to see all the fierceness and depravity of his character pictured there; but she met only the saddened gaze of tenderness. 'Twas such a look as might have characterized the countenance of a veteran warrior, when his soul was softened by the keen emotions of unfeigned pity and benevolence.

Cecilia gazed on him for a moment: undefinable feelings agitated her soul; she

felt internally convulsed, and the unbidden tears rushed from her eyes.

The robber grasped her soft hand harder in his. "Cecilia," he cried—"Cecilia, I have been disappointed and angry at the facility which you displayed, in seeming to credit the promise of such a being as I am: but I now repeat that promise; and remember that in the robber Angelo Guicciardini, Cecilia di Berlotti will ever have a protector."

He now let go her hand, and, after commanding the men who accompanied him to withdraw, turned towards the Father Ascollini, and, with a severe look, said:

"And you, Father Ascollini, observe, I *know you*. If the young man whom I have pursued, and too well conjecture to have entered here, is met by you at any future period, recollect that I now command you never to question him as to the cause of my visit here. He will not tell you, unasked, why I have sought him: question him not; and fail not likewise to remember that your pupil is now protected by Angelo Guicciardini."

The robber now rushed from the room, and summoning his followers with the shrill sound of his horn, they quitted the cottage; and soon the distant echo of the bugle spoke the speed of their flight.

The consternation of the little party they had left ceased not till the last feeble sound of the horn died away among the windings of the mountains; and then the Father

Ascollini, starting from a reverie into which he had fallen, exclaimed—

"Where is the youth whose precipitate and rude entry has exposed us to such an insolent outrage."

"Ay, where is he, my Cecilia?" enquired the signora, in a confused and half-abstracted manner, while her piercing eyes were rivetted on Ascollini, who was now pacing the room with a quick and agitated step.

Cecilia, but half recovering from the recent confusion of mind in which she had been involved, arose, and was approaching towards the pannel, designing to liberate the youth from his place of concealment, when Father Ascollini drew her back, saying, in a severe tone—

"I now recollect. Return, my dear child; it is not prudent that *you* should again attend to this young man; that care must now be mine."

He then led her back to the sofa, and, taking up a light, passed through the pannel.

CHAP. III.

Ere Cecilia could sufficiently recover herself from the amazement and distress which the recent scene occasioned her, the pannel was drawn aside; and the Father Ascollini re-entered the room, supporting the young

hunter, who, partly assisted by leaning on his spear, slowly and languidly approached.

Cecilia, urged by the impulse of compassion, now started up, and was hastening to pour some wine into a goblet, meaning to present it to the young stranger, when Ascollini, who had just placed the youth in a chair, snatched the cup out of her hand, and, with a look of anger, desired her to attend to her mother. Cecilia, covered with the blushes which surprise and confusion threw over her fair face, hastily retreated. She was not conscious that she had committed any improper action; and consequently the look of the father struck her as singular and offensive.

The signora also had observed the glance of Ascollini, and felt an emotion of indignant pride rising in her heart. She arose, and approaching the chair on which the young man was placed, silently essayed to assist the father in recovering him, while her cold and proud air seemed to recal the prior to his accustomed style of behaviour, and he now said: "This young man has been slightly wounded; and I wished your daughter to retire, lest the sight of his blood-stained dress should affect her too violently. Let me entreat you, signora, to take her hence, and allow me the attendance of Guispardo and Lodelli, who will be sufficient assistants to me."

The signora, who now perceived that the prior had spoken truly, bowed an as-

sent, and leading the dreadfully-shocked Cecilia from the room, sent the domestics to the assistance of the young man, and then retired to her own apartment with her daughter; where, interdicting all conversation on the recent events, she, with Cecilia, passed the night in prayers.

CHAP. IV.

The brilliant beams of the morning sun had scarcely tinged the bosom of the lake, when the Signora di Berlotti and Cecilia quitted the apartment of the former, and met the Father Ascollini in their usual sitting room.

The countenance of the prior was now pale and disturbed, and there was a haggard expression of discontent visible in his eyes, which Cecilia had never before observed in them. As she entered, he looked at her with a stealing, but scrutinizing glance, and when she joined her enquiries to those of her mother relative to the state of the youth, he answered querulously, and then fervently wished that the young stranger had never entered the cottage. The signora, after a short silence, directed Cecilia to give some order, which she had forgotten, to Lodelli; and the moment she withdrew, the prior, with much agitation in his manner, began to inveigh against the youth

who was thus thrown on their pity and protection for awhile.

"I cannot induce him by any argument I can devise, to reveal to me who or what he is. His language is elegant—his manner most insinuating: I believe he is not unlearned, and——"

"And how can all this concern us, father?" enquired the surprised signora." Is he any thing more to us than the object of our pity and present care!"

"*Present!*" repeated the prior, "I am much deceived if he will not prove an object of much *future* care to you. He is very handsome: his manner of thanking me for the little services I have rendered him, prove him possessed of the most prepossessing manners and address. He is not an object whom Cecilia can long behold with indifference: he seems near twenty, and she is sixteen; and so lovely——"

"Father Ascollini!" exclaimed the signora, in a tone which instantly checked the acrimonious impatience of the father's style, and covered his cheek with the deep blush of confusion Hesitatingly he now continued. "Perhaps my anxiety for the happiness of my amiable pupil, may have led me to indulge fears equally vain and improbable; but surely, it would be better if we could induce this youth to accept an asylum at my convent, than suffer him to continue here even for another day. I have already proposed this to him, but he has absolutely refused my offered kindness, and

has actually entreated me to obtain your permission for him to remain in the cottage for a few days longer; averring, in excuse for this request, that he is no stranger to the custom of your cottage; that is, never to return the weary or afflicted from your door. He then mentioned several instances of sick pilgrims having been sheltered by you for days together."

The signora did not immediately reply. She sat for a few moments apparently revolving what course she should in the present instance pursue; and at length she determined not to reject the request of the young hunter; and, of course assured the Father Ascollini that such was her intention.

Ascollini heard this resolve without making one more comment on the subject, and immediately withdrew to inform the young man that his request had been granted.

When he returned to the parlour, he found Cecilia preparing breakfast; and during this meal, which he partook with very little appetite, the father failed not to make female decorum the topic of his conversation; and as his hints and remarks were certainly just and prudent, the signora affected not to perceive the pointed expression of his manner; while the innocent Cecilia, wholly unconscious that they were directed towards herself, listened with an acquiescent attention, and unembarrassed manner, which half restored the father to his usual complacency.

Almost immediately after breakfast, Father Ascollini visited the young guest of the signora, who had not as yet quitted the room with which he had been accommodated on the preceding night.

In a short time the prior returned to the breakfast-room, and, with a look of peevish vexation, informed the signora that the young stranger was much better.

"But," added he, "I cannot induce him to give any particular account of himself: he has had even the obstinacy and audacity to tell me, that, as it is not to me that he is indebted for his good accommodation in the cottage, he does not consider himself under any necessity to be so unreserved towards me, as I seem inclined to wish." Ascollini then recommended to the signora to see the young man herself, and to endeavour to prevail upon him to declare who he really was.

The signora did not hesitate a moment in following this advice, and immediately proceeded to the chamber where her young guest still remained. The prior then retired, after desiring Cecilia to be ready to receive her accustomed lessons in about a couple of hours, as he was merely going to call at a cottage at no great distance, where he should not remain much longer than that time.

CHAP. V.

Cecilia proceeded to arrange her books and maps, but her thoughts were occupied by the young stranger and her mother, till the female domestic, Lodelli, came into the room, and drew her attention to another subject. In short, when the signora entered the room, she found Cecilia listening with earnest attention to Lodelli, who was so eagerly detailing a marvellous account of the exploits of the robber Angelo Guicciardini to her young lady, that neither was conscious of the entrance of the signora till she spoke.

Cecilia, deeply blushing at having listened to a subject which she feared would not be pleasing to her mother, stood silent and diffident, while Lodelli respectfully attempted an apology; but the signora was not displeased, and therefore dismissed her without any reprimand.

When the servant had retired, the signora, addressing Cecilia, said—

"You wish, I perceive, to hear some particulars of the man whose singular visit so much alarmed us last night, my Cecilia. That the name of Angelo Guicciardini has hitherto been unknown to you, is a circumstance to be attributed to our very recluse mode of life, and to the strict injunctions which I have ever laid on my domestics never to distract your attention with tales of wonder. The name of Ange-

lo has, however, been famous throughout this part of the country for some years; and he is unmolested in his retreat on account of the services which he renders to the peasantry. He is undoubtedly a robber, but he has never been known to outrage the persons of those who have fallen into his power: the crime of murder has never, it is said, been imputed to him; and many instances are recorded of his having saved numberless intended victims from the ferocious cruelty of the other hordes of banditti that infest the Alps. This man, in short, is described as holding a kind of sovereignty, and of dispensing favours and justice in a most impartial manner. His word is said to be ever sacredly fulfilled; and if he promises his protection to any individuals, they are in general secured from the power of their enemies: but this report I cannot fully credit: he has thought proper to promise you, Cecilia, this protection. How far it can prove serviceable to one who will not seek security amid Algerine wildernesses, time alone must determine: but as I do not intend to expatiate on the character of Angelo, I will hasten to mention the circumstance which has led me to speak of this singular robber. The young man to whom my cottage last night afforded protection from the pursuit of Angelo, is, I understand, an orphan of noble birth, and of a family most peculiarly unfortunate; he has been adopted and brought up by a hermit, who, protected by

this Angelo, lived, hid from the world, amid the wildest recesses of the Alps. These circumstances, my Cecilia, you must carefully conceal, and in speaking of this young man, remember that we are allowed only to say he is an orphan, his occupation that of a hunter, and his name Orazio Angelo.

"Angelo!" repeated Cecilia. "Is he then related to the robber?"

"He has been protected by him," replied the signora, significantly. Cecilia turned pale, and involuntarily shuddered.

The entrance of Father Ascollini put a period to the conversation of the signora and her daughter. In reply to the questions of the father, relative to the state of his young patient, the signora briefly informed him that the young man had acquainted her that he was an orphan, had been a hunter, and intended entering into the military profession; and that his name was Orazio Angelo.

"And no doubt the spurious offspring of that noted Angelo, who insulted you last night by forcibly intruding himself here in pursuit of his truant son," observed the father with contemptuous bitterness.

"You are severe, Father Ascollini," said the signora, mildly. "I believe the youth has not been educated in the school of Angelo Guicciardini."

"It is better to be severely cautious, than to become the dupe of this young

accomplished deceiver, who, no doubt, will be figuring away in a splendid style in some capital, as a foreigner of distinction, for he speaks three or four languages with tolerable correctness," replied the father with increased asperity.

The signora was hurt, and more secretly affected than she was willing to acknowledge even to herself; but not thinking it proper to enter into any further argument on the subject, she withdrew, leaving Cecilia to receive a portion of her daily instructions from the father.

For the first time Ascollini had just cause to complain of his pupil. With a mind fully occupied by reflections relative to the robber Angelo and the young hunter, Cecilia in vain attempted to yield her attention to the lessons of the father. Books, maps, and globes, courted her wandering thoughts without success; and it was not till after Ascollini had thrice declared that she was devoid of common comprehension that she had recollection to apologize; which she did by artlessly confessing that the thoughts of the robber and the young man had so bewildered her ideas, that she found it impossible to apply to her studies as she wished to do.

Cecilia expected that this confession would induce her tutor to lecture her severely. She was mistaken. Ascollini piqued himself upon being an admirable judge of human nature; and supposing, from the ingenuousness of his young pu-

pil's acknowledgment, that the robber and Orazio were the subjects of her thoughts, that the appearance of the latter had made no particular impression on her mind, felt rather more satisfied than he had done for some hours, and therefore forbore to make any further comment on her abstraction, and soon withdrew, saying, that he should now again visit the young man, of whose principles he declared he entertained the most fearful suspicions.

CHAP. VI.

CECILIA, thus left alone to her reflections, sat down to her embroidering frame, to finish a piece of work which Ascollini was to dispose of at a convent at Sesto, the produce of such articles furnishing the signora's principal means of relieving the distressed peasants, and strangers, who so often claimed her bounty. Equally vain however, was her present attempt to fix her attention on her employment. The robber, the young hunter—Angelo's promise of a protection which she seemed so little to need, and the angry conjectures of Father Ascollini, furnished sufficient and interesting employment for a mind till now unused to the contemplation of singular events within the limits of its own observation. Soon her fair hand rested inactive on the satin, and her bright brown

tresses shaded her eyes, so unconsciously fixed on the vivid colours of the flowers she had so skilfully imitated.

"Last night I thought," she mentally repeated to herself, "my dear mother seemed to think the words and conduct of the robber Angelo as prophetic of a thousand future evils to me: to-day she is calm and collected, seems to attach no consequence to his promise of protection, and appears to be wholly free from fear. This is contradictory." And now Cecilia blushed at having dared, even in thought, to revolve and scrutinize the conduct of her revered parent. Then her reflections turned on the young Orazio. The timidity of youthful innocence—the terror she suffered at the moment of his sudden entrance into the cottage, had prevented her from particularly noticing him; but the glance she had caught of his face and form was still sufficiently correct to assure her she had never seen any human being so strikingly interesting and handsome as the young hunter. Cecilia would have thought he looked too noble to be a robber, even had not her mother assured her that he was the orphan son of illustrious parents. 'Twas true she had been told that he was educated by a man protected by Angelo Guicciardini; but then did it follow of course that Orazio must be possessed of abandoned principles, such as Father Ascollini feared him tainted with, because his preceptor had been protected, perhaps from

some powerful and unjust oppressors, by the formidable Angelo Guicciardini. "Oh, no!" she mentally added, "for is not Angelo said to protect the good and innocent? Nay, has he not offered me his protection, and certainly I have done no wrong; and therefore I will not be so unjust as Father Ascollini seems to be; I will not condemn without conviction."

Thus did the innocent Cecilia unconsciously prepare her artless mind to receive prepossessions which she supposed her mother had most carefully sought to prevent her imbibing, by communicating to her the circumstance of Orazio's having been brought up by a person peculiarly befriended by the robber Angelo.

The sweet and soft serenity that ever succeeds the resolution of thinking with charity and compassion of the unknown and unfortunate, now diffused itself through the soul, and over the mind-illumined features of the young Cecilia; and, raising her eyes and heart to that beneficent Being who cares for the poor and friendless, she softly sung her evening hymn to the Virgin; and if her voice and expression were at this moment more than ever melodious and affecting, she was totally unconscious that she was heard by any being but that power who rules the universe, till the faint tones of a flute, gently and fearfully breathing an accompaniment in the third verse, suddenly attracted her attention—she paused and looked around. Cecilia was not very

superstitious, but she certainly possessed some portion of the enthusiasm and prejudice of her native country. She threw back the glossy ringlets which shaded her forehead, and her eyes wandered around in awful expectation of beholding some aëriel form of angelic nature. Nought was to be seen but the bright moon-beam, now stealing through the shade of the poplars and flowering shrubs, which waved near the window. Cecilia, after a momentary pause, recommenced her plaintive invocation, but soon again her watchful ear caught the sound of the invisible accompaniment, and she now plainly distinguished that the music proceeded from the room above, and as instantly recollected that it was the room always allotted to the use of strangers, and now occupied by the young hunter, Orazio.

An involuntary and violent agitation seized her bosom—she ceased singing, and, in almost breathless attention, listened anxiously to hear the strain, so exquisitely played, continued; but all was now silent, save the faint murmur of a distant brook that flowed through the garden, and the melancholy fluttering of the agitated poplars.

Not many minutes, however, did the suspensive emotion of Cecilia remain uninterrupted: a summons to supper relieved her perturbation, and recalled her to recollection.

On entering the room where the signora awaited her alone, the recent emotion

which had affected Cecilia was too legibly marked on her features, to escape the observation of her mother; and on being questioned as to the cause of her unusual agitation, the amiable girl confessed what had disturbed her mind so much; but she spoke with such timidity, and blushed so deeply, that the signora easily comprehended how profound and interesting an impression had been made upon the mind of her lovely daughter by the elegant young stranger.

The signora, however, did not make any particular remark on the acknowledgments of Cecilia. She rather treated the matter with indifference, and spoke no more of the young man during supper; nor did the involuntarily abashed Cecilia renew the subject.

After attending her mother to her apartment to receive the usual nightly maternal benediction, she retired to her own little room, whither she was attended by Lodelli; and this faithful domestic, emboldened by her lady not having expressed any disapprobation of her having given her daughter a long account of the robber Angelo Guicciardini, began to speak of the young Orazio, and tremblingly declared that she feared they should all be murdered in their beds—for father Ascollini had told Guispardo that he was almost convinced that the young hunter was the son of *Angelo Guicciardini*, and nothing more than a bandit in disguise.

Cecilia, half angry at the facility with which the father had propagated his suspicions, now declared, with a simplicity almost equal to Lodelli's, that it was false, as she knew very well that the young man was an orphan of respectable parents.

This information quieted, for the present, all the fears of Lodelli, who next commenced a long detail of Guispardo's remarks on the hunter.

"To be sure, Guispardo, as well as herself," said Lodelli, "had always lived in the country, and such humble, simple folks, as they both were, could know very little about the airs and manners of great counts and dukes, but by what they had seen of the grandeur of the signora their lady, and by what they had observed of the looks and manners of many of the great noblemen, who sometimes visited the palaces and gardens," (which were to be seen from a tall cliff at the foot of the garden,) "they could venture to say that the young hunter had much more the air of a prince than that of a robber."

Lodelli then proceeded to inform her young lady that the young stranger was much recovered, and was to pay his respects to the signora on the morrow at breakfast.

Cecilia heard this last intimation with a degree of emotion for which she could not account. She was displeased with herself, yet she could not conquer her agitation; but in the hope of putting an end to it, she

dismissed Lodelli, and sought to calm her spirits by the exercise of her nightly devotions, and for some time succeeded in banishing from her mind all sublunary subjects. As soon, however, as she prest her pillow, all the images which had recently crowded her imagination, returned with treble force. Short and broken slumbers, haunted with the same ideas, rather wearied than refreshed her; and when in the morning she descended to the little breakfast-room she was even more agitated than when she had joined her mother at supper on the preceding night. Fortunately, however, no person was in the room when she entered. This circumstance afforded her some relief; and in order to quell all remains of perturbation, she sat down to her drawing, and in a few minutes the Father Ascollini made his appearance, followed slowly by Orazio.

On the opening of the door, Cecilia had not raised her eyes from the sketch on which she was engaged, but the father's exclamation—"Is it possible the signora is not here!"—caused her to look up, when the first object she beheld was Orazio, who had just entered, and who, on meeting her eye, bowed most respectfully, but with a restrained look of wonder and admiration, which yet gave so animated an expression to his countenance, that Cecilia bent her eyes again on her drawing, at the same time faintly returning his salutation, while her face was suffused with

the liveliest glow. She looked not up again, but she felt disgusted with the tone of rude *hauteur*, with which the Father Ascollini now addressed the young man, and desired him to be seated, and await the appearance of the signora.

This little circumstance, by diverting her attention, restored Cecilia to so much composure, that, in her earnestness to atone for the prior's want of that delicate propriety which shrinks from wounding the feelings of those whose situation claims some consideration, she timidly addressed Orazio, and slightly apologized for her mother's absence.

For the first time in his life, Orazio found himself incapable of replying. He bowed still lower than he had done before; but Cecilia had not raised her eyes, and therefore she neither perceived the profound obeisance, nor the deep blush that dyed the manly cheeks of Orazio, and spoke more eloquently than a thousand words could have done.

The entrance of the signora at length relieved the whole party from some share of their mutual embarrassment. She addressed Orazio with politeness and urbanity; and if the hesitation and faultering manner in which he replied, afforded no particular proof of his not being deficient in gratitude, it certainly gave a timid tone to his affecting voice, which gave him no small share of increased interest in the mind of Cecilia, who was unconscious of

the attention with which she was listening, till a peevish exclamation from Father Ascollini, who was leaning over the back of her chair, and observing her progress in the sketch which she had begun, once more recalled her to recollection.

"Heigho!" exclaimed the father, "what are you about this morning? what a horrid curve! you have utterly ruined the outline of that tower."

More vexed and embarrassed than ever she had found herself in her life, Cecilia again felt a burning glow suffuse her cheeks: she threw down the pencil, and walked to the breakfast table. Seated beside her mother, she became less confused; but still she acquitted herself with less grace than ever she had done at any moment. Accustomed ever to present to the stranger or the visitor the choicest fruits which usually decked the table, Cecilia now hesitated to do so, and sat silent and serious; nor were the signora, Ascollini, or Orazio, apparently inclined to infringe on the taciturnity which reigned during this short meal.

The command which her mother gave her to retire at the conclusion of the repast was the most acceptable one she had ever received. She arose with ill-restrained alacrity; but as she gracefully withdrew, her timid eyes involuntarily met the glance of Orazio, whose earnest look, following her receding form, was mingled with an expression of so much humility and con-

cern, that it hastened her flight; and no sooner had she closed the door, than she flew through the rustic vestibule into the garden, and sought the deepest shade of the embowering arcades, to conceal her confusion from observation. Yet Cecilia was not struck with any irresistible prepossession in favour of Orazio; but the hints and little taunting ill-nature of Ascollini had made a deep impression on her mind; and the interest she involuntarily felt for the young man, as unfriended and persecuted, became only the more confirmed; as she dreaded to behave to him in the same manner as she had treated many of the objects of her mother's bounty, lest her actions should admit of misinterpretation from Ascollini, who might attribute to imprudent unreserve the little attentions which feeling and benevolent minds delight to pay to those who stand in need of consolation and assistance.

CHAPTER VII.

Nearly two hours elapsed ere Cecilia was summoned to attend her mother. She found the signora alone, and was informed that the Signor Orazio had departed with the Father Ascollini; the father having again offered him an asylum for a short time in his convent, which offer the young man had now accepted, but not till he had

intreated the signora's permission to pay his respects sometimes at the cottage.

Cecilia's varying colour spoke plainly that she heard this intelligence with mingled emotions of regret and pleasure.

"You seem much affected, Cecilia: what am I to suppose?" said the signora.

"What should my dear mamma suppose but the truth?" answered the artless girl. "I am sorry that the young signor has been obliged to withdraw from the cot, without having experienced any of those little kindnesses which are so very acceptable to the afflicted who possess sensibility; and yet I rejoice that he is gone, because his circumstances are such as to forbid all very friendly attentions; and that has made me so unhappy and so confused, that I really think I never could have the fortitude or patience to endure again what I have experienced from Father Ascollini's ill-nature, even for a week."

The Signora di Berlotti folded the innocent Cecilia to her bosom, mentally praying that her beloved child might ever preserve that captivating ingenuousness which is the best evidence of a virtuous and guileless heart.

"And now, my Cecilia," said this tender parent, "we will return to our usual daily occupations; and think of the recent interruptions we have received merely as a dream."

Cecilia wished to think all that had passed merely a dream; and she hesitated

not to assure her mother that she would endeavour to do so. The sincerity of this promise she evinced by paying every possible attention to the employments allotted to her for the day, and which the signora had wisely taken care should not be of a sedentary nature.

But towards the close of the evening, as Cecilia and her mother sat down to finish the labours of the day with their customary song of devotion, the thoughts of the lovely girl but too quickly reverted to the interruptions which she had experienced on the preceding evening from the stolen accompaniment which she could not but attribute to the young hunter Orazio. She was now, however, about to receive an interruption of a different nature; for scarcely had she prepared to commence the hymn to the Virgin, ere the arrival of a poor pilgrim was announced.

This stranger had earnestly desired to be admitted to the presence of the signora, and with an urgency which allowed of no refusal. The signora accordingly directed her daughter to retire, and then commanded that the pilgrim should be immediately conducted into the apartment where she was sitting.

As Cecilia withdrew, she met the pilgrim in the little vestibule. His figure seemed tall, and would have been commanding, had not the bend of age deprived him of that air of dignity which he seemed once to have possessed. A few silver locks

strayed from beneath his russet hat, and scarcely shaded his open brow, while the expression of a mild, yet scrutinizing anxiety sat on his looks.

As Cecilia passed him, she inclined her head with that humble reverence which virtuous sensibility ever pays to the aged and unfortunate; and the tone of fervent gratitude with which the venerable man returned his benediction, spoke a sweet reward to her guileless heart.

"Poor man!" thought the lovely girl—"he may once have enjoyed all the alluring splendours and all the fallacious pleasures of wealth. Now, perhaps, he is destitute, and a wanderer." And she flew to assist Lodelli in preparing such refreshments as she hoped might prove the most acceptable to the wearied traveller.

Cecilia's assiduous attention to the wants of the poor traveller soon, however, proved unnecessary; for after having passed an hour in private with the signora, he departed.

That a pilgrim should leave the cottage without having been well entertained, was a circumstance which excited the utmost wonder in the minds of the two faithful domestics of the signora; but the amazement of Cecilia was mingled with the highest degree of terror, when, on entering the parlour where her mother sat, she found her pale, agitated, and in tears.

The signora had been writing: several

papers lay scattered on the table, which the lady immediately began to collect, on the entrance of her daughter, to whose tender and anxious inquiries as to the cause of her grief and emotion she seemed to have scarcely power to reply. Fervently, however, did this affectionate parent enfold her beloved child to her beating heart, and wept in silence. Cecilia implored an elucidation of this mysterious sorrow, and at length the signora said—

"The pilgrim who has just left me was once one of my best-respected friends. His call at my cottage was not to solicit my bounty, but to communicate to me some important circumstances, the knowledge of which has thus deeply affected me. The affairs to which I allude are beyond my Cecilia's comprehension; and therefore I shall not indulge her with any further explanation."

"Dear mamma," said the lovely girl, blushing through her tears, "if your poor Cecilia has shown an imprudent eagerness to learn the occasion of your uneasiness, she has not so acted from motives of presumption, but from the wish of soothing your distress. Be the cause for ever confined to your own bosom; but let me indulge the hope that it may not long affect you thus."

The signora, now tenderly embracing her child, assured her, that her tears were only drawn forth by the sad remembrance

of past scenes of sorrow, and that she felt no doubt but that a few hours' repose would effectually calm her mind.

The Signora di Berlotti's melancholy smile and faint voice almost contradicted her words. Cecilia perceived that the spirits of her mother had received a severe shock; but she forbore to express her thoughts, lest she should offend her beloved parent, and therefore endeavoured to assume a cheerfulness most foreign to her heart.

After an almost untasted supper, during which the pilgrim was not once mentioned, Cecilia attended her mother to her apartment; and leaving her apparently more composed, retired to her own, not to sleep, but to pass the night in prayers for the happiness and health of her revered parent.

CHAPTER VIII.

At an early hour in the morning, the affectionate mother and daughter once more met in the parlour. The signora looked paler than she had even done on the preceding night; but she seemed perfectly calm and collected, and soon after breakfast dispatched a messenger to the priory to the Father Ascollini.

She then sat down to her escrutoire, and dismissed Cecilia to her embroidering frame.

Slowly, and for the first time reluctantly, did Cecilia obey the command of her mother. The amiable girl fancied she perceived in the looks and manner of the signora much concealed embarrassment and anxiety; and her grief, at not being permitted to share and sooth the sorrows of her parent, was extreme.

Tears of filial piety and love obscured her sight, as she tremblingly attempted to commence her work; but she soon found the execution of the task at present so impracticable, that she desisted, and involuntarily yielded to the sorrowing emotions that agitated her bosom.

From this state of meditative misery, Cecilia was, however, at length awakened by the sudden entrance of the signora, followed by the Father Ascollini, whose looks spoke all that chagrin and anger could express, while the air of the signora was seriously calm and collected.

Cecilia, confused and alarmed at having been found weeping, and in so much emotion, started up, and would have retired; but the Father Ascollini, with all the freedom that his years and his situation respecting the family in some degree permitted him to use, caught her hand, and drew her back, exclaiming—

"What is the occasion of this dear child's tears? Cecilia, what has occurred to render *you* thus unhappy? See, madam," he added, turning abruptly towards the signora—" observe what may be the

event of your dividing your affections. The peace of my dear pupil will be ruined. Accept my advice, signora, and, as you value all that is dear to you, dismiss every idea of befriending one who must be so unworthy of your regard."

Cecilia now gazed on her mother with looks of wonder and inquiry. The signora desired her to approach, placed her beside herself on the sofa, and folding her affectionately to her bosom, said—

"The zeal of the Father Ascollini has hurried an explanation which I intended you should not receive without due preparation. But my Cecilia will certainly acquiesce in her mother's resolves, without experiencing any of that repining jealousy which the good father so much fears may embitter your peace."

"Ah, Father Ascollini!" exclaimed Cecilia, her whole countenance animated with delight at the idea of having an opportunity of evincing her love and obedience to the best of parents—"how could you imagine that I could venture to oppose, even by the slightest look of discontent, the wishes of my mother?"

"I hope you will have no cause to repent the indulgence of these extraordinary wishes!" said the prior, with increasing acrimony, to the signora.

"Oh! my mother!" cried the lovely girl, heedless of the displeasure of Ascollini, "permit me to intreat that you will have the goodness to name your will; for

I die with impatience to prove to you my fervent submission to your commands."

"I have no commands to give, my Cecilia," replied the signora, her fine features expressing all the tenderest approbation of her daughter—"I have only to explain to you that a singular and important duty has devolved to me, that of becoming the nominal parent of a young man, to whose virtues and vices I am personally a stranger, but of whose principles I have received the most favourable accounts. Orazio Angelo is——"

"Orazio Angelo!" exclaimed Cecilia; and her eyes fell beneath the look of her mother, while her cheeks were suffused with a crimson glow.

Ascollini uttered a groan of anger, arose, and paced the room in great agitation. The signora continued her explanation.

"Orazio Angelo, my Cecilia—he is bequeathed to my care by one whose wishes I am bound by the most sacred ties to revere. Orazio then shall be my adopted son, and Cecilia will consider him as a brother, unless he should forfeit that endearing title by proving himself less amiable than he has been represented."

The timid, blushing Cecilia was about to reply, but was prevented by Father Ascollini exclaiming—

"Signora Berlotti, this is romantic folly, unworthy a pious and sensible female, and such as a man of my years and office cannot witness without loudly con-

demning. What! introduce into your retired family a young man with whose real character and principles you are wholly unacquainted! Propose him as the brother and companion of this artless, innocent child! Once more I caution you to beware. Cecilia di Berlotti, educated in retirement, and devoted from infancy to embrace a conventual life, must not have the purity of her mind sullied by an association with unknown profligates and wanderers; or she will be utterly unfitted for the sacred profession to which heaven invites her."

Father Ascollini, now unable to keep his indignation within the bounds of propriety, retired with precipitation, leaving the Signora di Berlotti extremely agitated, and Cecilia overwhelmed with amazement and terror.

Some moments of profound silence ensued. At length Cecilia timidly ventured to inquire whether the father's assertion, that she was intended for a conventual life, was strictly true.

"Father Ascollini has not deviated from the truth, my dear Cecilia; and this information may account to you for the incessant praises of the life of a nun that continually forms the topic of his conversation. Should you take the veil, you are to receive a handsome portion; and a considerable sum is to be bestowed upon charitable purposes on the day of your profession. To see you thus tranquilly settled has been

the favourite contemplation of Ascollini, even from your infancy; and you cannot but recollect how much he has been gratified when you have frequently avowed your predilection in favour of those religious institutions, where young females are so well secured from all the vicissitudes of life."

Cecilia turned pale, and her voice faltered, as, with a timid and imploring look, she fixed her eyes on the pensive countenance of the signora, and said: "And you, my dearest mother—you wish me now to commence my noviciate; you wish your Cecilia absent, that she may be free from the danger which Father Ascollini fears may await me in the society of the young signor whom you adopt."

"No, my Cecilia," eagerly replied the Signora di Berlotti—"Confident in your prudence and ingenuousness, I fear not the influence even of bad example on a heart like thine. Vice must disgust, never seduce, that being whose soul is susceptible of all the charms of virtue. No, my beloved child, I cannot part with thee. If in Orazio I find a want of that rectitude and honour which can alone enable him to obtain or fix our esteem, I will instantly withdraw from him my protection; but as I do not entertain apprehensions similar to those which perplex and enrage Father Ascollini, I shall certainly follow the present dictates of my heart, and receive this young man as—my Cecilia's brother. In less

than a month, I hope he will be presented with a commission in the Venetian army; and, of course, we shall then be freed from all trouble on his account. But I must now prepare to receive my young *protegé*, whom I have engaged to dine with us to-day. He will continue to sleep at the convent, while he remains in this part of the country; but his days will be spent chiefly in the cottage."

The signora now arose, and kissing the fair forehead of her daughter, withdrew, leaving Cecilia agitated with a thousand varying feelings.

CHAP. IX.

A SUMMONS to attend her mother in her chamber soon interrupted the thoughts of Cecilia. The moment she appeared before the signora, she received an order to hasten to arrange her dress, as the Father Ascollini, Orazio, and a stranger, were almost momentarily expected.

Cecilia hastened to obey this command. Her simple robe and luxuriant tresses were soon adjusted. Never had she looked so lovely as when she returned to the apartment of her mother, and was by her led into the parlour to receive the expected guests.

A few moments only elapsed ere they arrived.

Ascollini entered first, followed by the pilgrim who, on the preceding night, had visited the signora; while, slowly in the rear, advanced the graceful form of the young Orazio.

The unexpected appearance of the pilgrim happily checked the embarrassing emotions of Cecilia. The nobility of his air, the respect which Ascollini paid him, and the dignity with which he presented Orazio to the signora and herself, were circumstances which engaged the whole attention of Cecilia, who timidly gazed upon him with a look of mingled reverence and curiosity.

"To your benignant and maternal care I once more recommend this youth, Signora di Berlotti," said the pilgrim, in a tone of softened seriousness. "His further claims to your kindness must be fixed by his own merits. Should he prove unworthy of the sacrifices you are making in regard to his parents, I cannot wish him a severer punishment than the loss of your esteem."

"And you, young lady," continued the stranger, addressing Cecilia with parental gentleness of manner, "in permitting Orazio Angelo to call you sister, have already conferred on him a privilege, the value of which should be to him inestimable."

The stranger spoke with much emotion, yet the expression of his feelings appeared faint, when compared with the almost overwhelming agitation which Orazio betrayed. Alternately pale or glowing, his

expressive features spoke the most lively sensibility of soul, while, bending lowly over the hand which the signora presented to him, and raising it respectfully to his lips, he said, in a voice scarcely audible—

"Could the recollection of this moment be ever obliterated from my heart, I should then indeed cease to be susceptible of every sentiment which the liveliest gratitude and the most profound veneration can inspire." And now Orazio turned his dark expressive eyes on Cecilia; but to her he spoke not, yet his looks evinced all the tenderness, admiration, and respect, that seemed to animate his heart.

"And you, Father Ascollini," said the stranger, addressing the prior with an air of impressive gravity, "you, I imagine, must now be perfectly sensible that the signora, in the present instance, acts in a manner perfectly consistent with her usual prudence and benignity."

"I am convinced, signor, that you would not recommend a line of conduct to this lady, which would not be exactly proper for her to follow."

Thus spoke Ascollini, but his manner was so evidently constrained, that even Cecilia perceived how ill his words and internal sentiments corresponded.

Guispardo now announcing that dinner waited, put an end to all further conversation, and the little party immediately obeyed the summons.

Silence, embarrassment, and constraint,

still, however, marked the deportment of the prior, while the signora and the pilgrim entered into a desultory conversation, in which they soon induced Orazio and Cecilia to join, thus freeing the young people from some portion of the timid restraint with which they seemed to view each other.

At the conclusion of the meal, the signora led the way into the apartment peculiarly belonging to Cecilia. Her music, her drawing, the elegant embroidery, were but slightly noticed by the pilgrim, whose whole attention seemed fixed on the contents of her small but well selected library, which Ascollini most assiduously displayed, omitting not to inform the stranger that the books of the young signora had been chiefly chosen by himself; and could the prior have felt much gratification from any compliment paid to him by the pilgrim, he might now have exulted in the delicate but animated commendations which were lavished on the good taste and strict morality which he had evinced in his careful superintendence of his young pupil's mental studies.

While the Father Ascollini and the stranger were thus engaged, the signora entered into conversation with Orazio relative to his future prospects, and mentioned, as a matter of course, his entering the army in about a month. This subject, however, on which the young man spoke with all the ardour and animation of an

heroic spirit, was soon interrupted by the pilgrim, who, after complimenting the signora on the felicity she enjoyed in the amiable qualities of her daughter, expressed many regrets at being under the necessity of almost immediately departing. He then advanced towards Cecilia, and presented to her a small casket, requesting her to wear the few ornaments it contained in remembrance of the giver, who felt for her sentiments more tender than he could express.

The looks of the pilgrim so fully confirmed his words—so much gentleness and placid affection beamed from his eyes as he spoke, that Cecilia, much affected by his manner, scarcely needed the approving glance of her mother to induce her to accept a gift, no otherwise valuable to her than as the testimonial of the regard of one whose dignified and venerable appearance deeply interested her.

The stranger now bade adieu, and, accompanied by Orazio, who, he said, would attend him to a short distance from the cottage, departed.

The moment they were gone, Cecilia, on an intimation from her mother, sat down to her embroidery, while the signora with an air of indifference, but too evidently affected, attempted to commence a conversation on unimportant concerns with Ascollini, who, after briefly replying, abruptly said—" Are you certain, madam, that this

pilgrim is really a personage of noble birth?"

"Yes, I am well convinced that he is so."

"And how can he have acquired such an interest for a youth, who has never till now quitted the Alpine solitudes in which he has been educated?"

"How frequently, Father Ascollini," said the signora, in a tone fully indicative of reserve and vexation, "how frequently have I declared to you the impossibility of satisfying your curiosity and doubts? Once more let me intreat you to spare me on this subject; and rest assured, that the moment when I perceive any thing in this affair which my conscience should condemn, I will instantly pursue another line of conduct. In the meanwhile the young Orazio will be chiefly under your own eye, and——"

"But what advantage shall I derive from that circumstance, while he is enveloped in so much mystery?" said the prior peevishly. "This stranger, whom you aver to be a nobleman of high rank, came to my convent last night: he entreated entertainment for the night. I hospitably admitted him: he desired to see the young hunter. Surprised as I was at this request, I instantly ordered the young man to be summoned. The moment the stranger beheld him, he became extremely agitated—muttered something about likeness and

noble air, and embraced the youth, who, I believe, had never before beheld him, and was as much agitated by the conduct of the visitor, as I was surprised myself; and then, when the emotion of both had a little subsided, this nobleman requested to be left alone with Orazio. I consented, and they were closeted together all the night—I, it seems, was not worthy of the least confidence. In the morning, indeed, your friend deigned to enter into a long argument with me respecting your adoption of the young man, informed me that he had already visited you, and then condescended to assure me that no evil was likely to ensue from such a step; and pledged his honour for the propriety of Orazio's conduct towards both you and myself. He then offered me a handsome present for the attentions which the youth has received at my convent. This, with much difficulty, I accepted; and this is all I am informed of respecting the affair."

The re-entrance of Orazio himself now checked the volubility of Father Ascollini, who, however, expressed some surprise at the shortness of his absence.

The young man declared that his friend would not permit his attendance beyond the lime-grove, near the foot of the hill. Traces of agitation were visible on his fine features; but he evidently essayed to conquer his feelings; and as he was silent respecting his parting with the pilgrim,

neither the signora nor Ascollini reverted any further to the circumstance.

After a short pause, a general conversation ensued, in which Orazio displayed a well cultivated understanding, good sense, talents, and above all, the most engaging, yet manly modesty.

The Signora di Berlotti was mentally charmed with the estimable qualities which appeared to adorn this interesting youth; even Ascollini was pleased, while Cecilia, gradually resuming all the graces of unaffected ingenuousness and simplicity, conversed with all the artless candour of her nature, and soon began to consider her new brother as a most acceptable acquisition to their society.

The evening passed rapidly. Orazio's taste for and knowledge of music and drawing were soon discovered to exceed even those of Cecilia. Mutual talent, virtue, and sensibility, seemed apparent in each; and when the prior and his young companion took their leave for the night, each soothed their secret regrets with the pleasing hope that the following morning was to re-unite the happy party.

CHAP. X.

Soon after the departure of Father Ascollini and Orazio, the ladies retired to

repose. Fain would Cecilia have hazarded some timid enquiries respecting the pilgrim, and Orazio's unexpected reception in the cottage, but the serious looks of her mother had repelled her wishes, and Cecilia retired to the solitude of her own little room to compose her spirits by the never-failing influence of devotion.

Sleep, serene and soft, visited her pillow; and the morning's dawn beheld her glowing with the roseat tints of health and peace.

The sun had not risen when she arose. The first object that her eyes encountered was the casket given her by the pilgrim. She had, on the preceding evening, neglected to examine its contents; she now eagerly opened it, and found within a small diamond cross suspended from a string of pearls, and a pair of curiously formed pearl bracelets with diamond clasps.

The elegance of this present struck her with extreme surprise. Hitherto Cecilia had never worn any ornament but the simple ivory cross that hung on her bosom, or the blooming flowers which she sometimes mingled in the shining tresses of her luxuriant hair, while even her whole dress was little superior to that of the peasant girls who inhabited the borders of the lake. The pilgrim's request, that she would wear the jewels contained in the casket, now appeared to her as the most singular inconsistency, and she felt the utmost embarrassment on recollecting that she had

promised to wear them. To her mother, at length, she resolved to apply immediately on the subject; but as the signora had not yet risen, Cecilia was compelled to exert her patience, and she descended to the garden to assist in the labours of Lodelli, who was already busily employed in attending to some beautiful flowers which had been injured by an accident on the preceding day.

Cecilia had not been long in the garden, when Orazio made his appearance. A mutual blush betrayed the emotion of each as they met. Soon, however, this embarrassment ceased: Orazio joined in the occupation of Cecilia and Lodelli, the latter of whom soon declared that the young signor had saved them a world of trouble, as he had done more in a few minutes, than she could have done in an hour.

Orazio, indeed, took effectual care that Cecilia's share of the task should be light, and if his look wa[illegible]t some moments, more animated and t[illegible]er than the looks of brothers usually a[illegible]e, yet Cecilia's timid eyes so seldom encountered his, that she perceived not the delight and agitation which the guileless *naiveté* of her manners inspired.

An hour appeared but a moment in the present estimation of Orazio, who could not believe that time had flown so swiftly, when Lodelli, suddenly seizing her work, declared that she must hasten in to prepare breakfast, as the signora might now be ex-

pected down every moment. The absence of Lodelli threw an involuntary restraint on both Orazio and Cecilia: for a few moments neither spoke. Cecilia employed herself more earnestly, while Orazio began to make a thousand little errors in arranging the trellis work.

Cecilia soon became equally confused—"We can do nothing without Lodelli," said she, and walked a few paces away.

Orazio likewise desisted, and slowly followed her steps.—The walk they had entered was broad, and overarched by luxuriant myrtles: Cecilia would have gone round another way to the house, but she perceived the signora at the upper extremity of the walk they had entered, and she now hastened to meet her mother.

The signora received Orazio with the pleased smile of maternal welcome. Cecilia, sanctioned by her presence, again displayed all the artless animation of her disposition; and to the watchful glances of Father Ascoli, who joined the party soon after breakfast, began to lose some of their embarrassing effects.

Day after day now fled with a rapidity before unknown at the cottage. Orazio, an almost constant inmate, became every hour more dear to the signora. The almost filial reverence and affection which appeared in even his slightest looks and actions, the delicate and fraternal regard with which he behaved to Cecilia, even while it was evident that he idolized her, gave so fa-

vourable an opinion of his principles and self-denial, that, at length, Ascollini was compelled to acknowledge to the signora that her adopted son was a very extraordinary young man, but still he invariably declared, that the result of his stay at the cottage must inevitably prove destructive to the happiness of Cecilia In reply to this, the signora usually said—" It is impossible that Cecilia should conduct herself as she does, and yet feel any sentiment for this young man more tender than sisterly affection. She has been taught to call him brother: she does so. She is unembarrassed in his presence—attends to her different occupations, and your lessons, with even more than her accustomed earnestness, and—"

The prior shook his head, and, interrupting the signora, said—

" And 'tis this very earnest attention which Cecilia gives to all her employments, which convinces me that *she* already feels her danger, if *you* do not."

Still, however, the signora seemed insensible to all the representations of Ascollini; and Orazio continued to assist in the lessons and some of the employments of Cecilia, who had, indeed, as the prior very justly foretold, imbibed for her nominal brother sentiments which neither time nor circumstances could wholly obliterate from her heart. Of this, however, she was not yet conscious. The apparently noble disposition, amiable manners, and interesting si-

tuation of Orazio, were so many claims on her regard and esteem, that, in beholding him with the most artless affection and concern, she imagined she was fulfilling only those duties of charity and love, which religion and virtue enjoins.

It was true, she condemned herself for thinking so much about her nominal brother, and therefore devoted the most unremitted assiduity to her studies and domestic concerns; and if the idea of him but too frequently intruded on her mind during his short absences, she seldom failed to endeavour to give double attention to her tasks, consoling herself with the reflexion that, when at the close of evening, they should, in the presence of the signora, join in the harmonious chaunts and hymns of thanksgiving for the blessings of the day, she should then always find opportunities of proving to him that, in her strict attention to her employment, she had not designed to treat him with neglect or reserve. And while Cecilia with such artless sophistry soothed the growing affection which was fast entwining wreaths of thorns around her heart, Orazio seemed to have imbibed for her a passion deep and ardent, yet apparently pure as her own; for although the real state of his feelings was evident to every eye, yet to Cecilia herself he behaved with all the delicate tenderness of fraternal affection.

CHAP. XI.

About a fortnight was now passed by the society at the cottage in all the mingled joys and pains to which the feelings of each individual gave rise. Ascollini fretted and repined, as he watched the stealing glances of Orazio; the signora seemed pensive and observant, and the innocent Cecilia, unconscious of the state of her own heart, yielded herself up to the delight of loving Orazio, 'till a circumstance occurred which, by informing her in part of the truth, overwhelmed her with confusion.

One night as she was preparing to retire to repose, in looking for some trifling article which she wanted, she perceived the casket of jewels which the pilgrim had given her, lying where she had placed it on the morning when she had intended to consult her mother as to the impropriety of her wearing such ornaments. Blushing at the conviction of how much her mind must have been pre-occupied when she could so long have neglected to speak to the signora on the subject, she now thoughtfully unclosed the casket, when, to her infinite surprise, she found a most singular addition to its contents, and this was a small billet closely folded. She opened it, and, with the utmost alarm and confusion, read the following lines.—

"Cecilia, you love, and Orazio Angelo

is the object of your sudden attachment.—Learn that the possessor of your secret is

ANGELO GUICCIARDINI."

The billet fell from the trembling hands of Cecilia:—faintly she pronounced "the robber Angelo!" and sunk, nearly fainting, on her couch. When she recovered it was only to feel in excess all the contrariety of emotions the most overwhelming.——Love! was it possible that she could love Orazio Angelo, otherwise than as a sister should?—Cecilia trembled more violently when her heart replied, that the accusation of Guicciardini was true. Her ideas now became vague and indistinct. In every other dilemma, Cecilia had been ever accustomed to unbosom the feelings of her heart to her beloved parent; the timid delicacy of her disposition caused her instantly to reject such a resource in the present instance, and her confusion and distress had deprived her almost of strength to resist the agitation that overpowered her.

The mind of Cecilia was sensible and well informed; but she possessed a sensibility of the most dangerous nature. Susceptible of every emotion which religion and virtue did not condemn, she had been ever inclined to yield unresistingly to the impulses of a pure and ingenuous heart; and unhappily the signora, finding her own griefs soothed, and her feelings interested by the unfeigned and warm participation of her sorrows, which Cecilia had

ever evinced, had neglected to check the progress of a propensity which might prove so fatal to the peace of her daughter. In extenuation of this error it may, however, be urged that the signora considered that the conventual life to which Cecilia was to be devoted, could afford no opportunities for the indulgence of excessive sensibility. The recent unexpected circumstances had now, however, proved how futile and vain are the foresights and plans of human wisdom.

Nearly half an hour elapsed ere Cecilia recovered in some degree from the confusion and distress into which the billet of the robber Angelo had plunged her, and when she was even more composed, she could not so far tranquillize her spirits as to be capable of devotion, or of retiring to rest.

Slowly, and with trembling limbs, she crept to the small latticed window of her room; the mild air of the summer night, perfumed with a thousand sweets, gently agitated the jessamine that shaded the window. The pale beams of a rising moon rendered distinguishable the lofty summits of the Alps, and threw a thousand varied shades over the wooded heights and luxuriant vineyards; while glistening in a long expanded line, appeared part of the Lago Maggiore.

Cecilia's eye no longer rested on the prospect with delight: self approbation was now a stranger to her bosom, and all the scenes which had been dear to her heart

from the earliest dawn of youth, now appeared cheerless and confused.

Too much affected to experience the relief which tears usually afford, she felt an oppressive weight impede her respiration. She unclosed the lattice, yet the soft breeze seemed to chill her soul. Faint, and at intervals scarcely distinct, the sound of the distant priory bell, chiming the hour of midnight prayer, reverberated along the side of the hill. It sounded to Cecilia as the knell of death: undefined and fearful presentiments of evil and danger assailed her harassed mind. She started up, and, with quick and light steps, stole softly to the door of her mother's apartment. All was silent within. She tremblingly retreated, ashamed that the violence of her imaginary fears had urged her to disturb the repose of her mother. Once more she re-entered her own apartment; but it was dark and comfortless. During her short absence her night lamp had expired, and the feeble rays of the moon, scarcely penetrating the embowering jessamine that strayed around the window, gave a mournfully indistinct outline to the room, which impressed her mind with additional emotion.

Incapable of repose, and in the hope of tranquillizing, in some measure, her unusually disturbed spirits, she softly descended the stairs, and entered the garden. The fragrant odour of innumerable shrubs and flowers filled the air with balmy sweet-

ness, and soon the soothing influence of the perfumed atmosphere, and the starry splendours of the heavens, restored her to a degree of composure; but still a mournful sadness and depression remained on her heart, and while, with softened feelings, she felt the tears flow fast from her eyes, she half resigned herself to the idea that her destiny had decreed her the misery of too tenderly regarding the only being whom her duty forbade her to think of.

In this moment, the recollection that Ascollini had once declared that she was intended to take the veil recurred. The signora had confirmed the assertion. An asylum was then open to her—an asylum where she might learn, by unceasing care and repentance, to eradicate those sentiments from her soul, which she had so involuntarily, and so unhappily imbibed. The mind of Cecilia now embraced with avidity the thought of religious seclusion. Enthusiastic and inexperienced, she instantly adopted the belief, that when she had once received the veil, she should for ever be freed from the agonizing misery of loving one, whom, she imagined, it was obvious her mother would not approve, as she had been repeatedly desired by her to consider Orazio as a brother.

"If I shall not be happy after all; if I should be so unfortunate as to think too much of Orazio Angelo; yet, when I am concealed in the solitude of the cloister, my beloved mother will not behold my unhap-

piness:" said Cecilia, unconsciously. "I shall also be free from the persecuting and prying notice of that terrible Guicciardini; and my tutor Ascollini will then continully soothe the regrets of my mother for my absence, by assurances that my heart is devoted to heaven, and not to Orazio Angelo." And now Cecilia sighed deeply, and starting from the rustic bench on which she had been seated, heard her sigh re-echoed, and, in the next moment, beheld the gigantic figure of the robber Angelo at her side. Powerless to shriek, she sunk senseless at his feet.

The reviving chill of water, thrown on her pallid features, recalled her to life, but with reanimation, returned the idea of Angelo Guicciardini. Not daring to unclose her eyes, lest they should encounter the form of one so terrific to her imagination, she struggled to free herself from the encircling arm which supported her; but she was almost instantly nearly again deprived of sense, by hearing the voice of Orazio, who, in a tone expressive of the deepest emotion, whispered, "My Cecilia, —my sister, look up. What do you fear? 'Tis Orazio—'tis your brother, who implores you to save him the anguish of beholding you thus!"

Cecilia faintly pronounced his name, and making another effort to disengage herself, sunk on the bench, yet was still supported by Orazio, who appeared to be as much agitated as the object of his care.

"Oh, why are you here?" he faulteringly said. "To what circumstance am I to impute the unexpected happiness of seeing you at such a moment? Do you often walk here alone, Cecilia?"

"No," replied the trembling girl, fearful of betraying by her emotion the secret uneasiness which had driven her from repose; and instantly endeavouring to evade further enquiry, she added, "But where is the *robber* Angelo?"

"Angelo! Angelo Guicciardini?" said Orazio, in a low and tremulous tone.

"Yes: was he not there but a few moments since? Oh! how his appearance terrified me! Did he fly at your approach? But wherefore are *you* here?

"I tremble to answer your question, Cecilia," returned Orazio, "for my reply must render me a thousand times more mysterious, and an object of more suspicion than ever. I am come,—" and his voice became almost inarticulate. "I came to take a last, a farewel glance of this cottage: this abode, which will henceforth contain all that I most value on earth. A circumstance of the most unexpected nature compels me to flee from this country with the utmost precipitation. I shall appear, both to yourself and your tutor, as the most ungrateful and worthless of human beings. Yet, oh, Cecilia! do not you judge thus of me: time may unfold the hidden causes which urge me to acts the most repugnant to my soul; and till then I

will plead no further extenuation of my conduct."

A loud whistle now sounded from the glen beneath.

Orazio started up. He clasped the trembling hands of Cecilia in his; and, in convulsed and hurried accents, said—

"I must be gone—oh, Cecilia! I will not, dare not tell you what I suffer; but, I conjure, I implore you, to judge not from appearances. Whatever is my hapless destiny, I shall bear with me through life; and, in death, your image. It is impressed on my heart in colours indelible; and the name of Cecilia shall ever be to me the signal to act with courage and resolution: to endure with fortitude, and to conquer or die in the cause which I have undertaken. Adieu, my beloved, my sister!"

Half timid, half ardently, he once ventured to enfold the lovely form of Cecilia to his agitated bosom: again repeated her name in a tone the most tender and impassioned; and then fled, with precipitation, amid the o'erhanging chesnut wood, whose shadowy branches formed a canopy over the seat on which, Cecilia, scarcely alive, reclined.

CHAP. XII.

When the unhappy girl recovered some share of recollection, she gazed around her,

as if awakening from a frightful slumber. The rustling of the leaves above her head, the long, dark shadows stretched across the path, became objects of alarm to her disordered mind; and she dared not to move, lest the sound of her footstep should recal the robber Angelo, or Orazio. That she had seen the former, she felt too truly convinced; the figure of Angelo was too strikingly impressive to be mistaken had she even beheld him in the shade; but the moonlight, beaming on his dark features and martial form, had revealed him fully to her astonished sight. The sigh which she had heard, as he started on her view, the looks he had bent on her, were never to be forgotten. The almost instantaneous insensibility which had succeeded, had not effaced the impression from her mind; and even the unexpected appearance of Orazio had only contributed to heighten her horror and distress, as it suggested the dreadful idea that he had been in company with the robber. Reflection could not remove this harrowing suspicion. He had avowed that he was flying from the country, but had not given any explanation of the circumstances which induced him to resolve on such an act; and his expression that "hidden causes urged him to acts the most repugnant to his soul," together with the loud whistle that had summoned him away, attached an idea of art and guilt to his conduct, which not even the remembrance of his solemn manner of entreating her not

to judge by appearances, could banish from the mind of Cecilia.

Quickly these reflections hurried through the soul of the afflicted girl; but she gradually regained sufficient strength to be capable of rising, and of walking towards the cottage; which, at length, she reached. The door was open, as she had left it. Cautiously she stole back to her chamber. She entered the room with a sensation of shuddering horror at the reflection of the scene in which she had been engaged since she quitted it, while the remembrance of the sentiments which she had felt for Orazio but scarcely more than an hour back, and those of dread and anguish, which his name now inspired, filled her bosom with unutterable shame and grief.

Humiliated and oppressed by sorrow, she knelt and implored the protection and aid of that gracious power to whom her earliest hopes were raised. She soon became more calm, but yet she found it impossible to sleep; and when the sun, risen high above the horizon, and the busy steps of Lodelli, gave her the usual signal for rising, she tremblingly descended to the lower apartments, looking the pale image of grief.

CHAP. XIII.

Although cheerful, and actively intent on her employments, Lodelli had yet seldom

any attention for any thing else when her beloved young lady was present; and the moment this faithful servant cast her eyes on the languid frame, and altered countenance of Cecilia, she almost shrieked with affright, while, starting back, she begged to know what was the matter with her dear young signora.

Cecilia replied evasively, but truly, that she felt herself very ill.

The young woman shook her head.—"Ah, my dear young lady, this is not the way you used to look whenever you was ill: you used to look pale, indeed, but then you would smile so sweetly, and seem so composed and resigned, and only looked unhappy when you thought your mamma, or your poor servants, grieved about you; but now, Santa Virgine, now your eyes are red and heavy—your looks are almost wild, and so doleful, that one might almost vow you had seen or heard something quite horrid." "Horrid, indeed!" involuntarily murmured Celilia, and mechanically began to assist Lodelli in arranging the breakfast.

"O, Dio mio!" exclaimed the faithful Lodelli, "what can have happened to fright you thus, my dear young lady?" The dismayed look, and terrified voice in which Lodelli spoke, recalled Cecilia to recollection; and, uneasy at having betrayed the excess of the distress which she caused this affectionate being, the ami-

able girl attempted to smile, while she declared, she had not been alarmed by any supernatural appearance.

The slow footstep of the signora was now heard descending the stairs. Cecilia trembled, and the death-like paleness of her countenance increased. She heard her mother call on her name; she could not reply, and had scarcely power to move.

Lodelli again looked at her aghast, and instantly recollecting how much the signora might be alarmed by the appearance of her daughter, hastened to the parlour, whither her lady had gone; and was just commencing an hesitating account of her young lady's situation, when Father Ascolini rushed into the room, exclaiming—

"Where is Cecilia? where is the dear child? oh that young bandit!" And the prior looked around with the wildest eagerness, while the Signora di Berlotti, motionless with surprize and dread, seemed incapable of enquiring into the cause of the Father's alarm.

"Where is she, I demand?" again cried Ascollini, and instantly Cecilia appeared. Pale, trembling, and with unequal steps, she tottered towards her mother, and sunk, nearly senseless, on her bosom.

The Signora di Berlotti did not faint: the horror and alarm of the moment seemed to inspire her with power to resist the overwhelming feelings which would, at any other period, have deprived her of sense.

With a fixed look, she regarded the

closed eyes of Cecilia, while father Ascollini raved for restoratives for the lovely girl, and alternately execrated the name of Orazio.

In a few moments Cecilia re-opened her eyes: she raised her languid glance to the face of her mother.

"Cecilia, my Cecilia," cried the affectionate parent, "thou art innocent: thy look speaks all the purity of thy soul."

Cecilia hid her face again in the bosom of her mother, while, in low and trembling accents, she said—

"I did not meet him intentionally."

"Meet *him!* meet whom?" cried the signora and Ascollini at the same moment.

Cecilia shùddered; deep sighs spoke the torture of her heart.

"Explain, explain to me, the import of those words, my beloved child, or I shall run distracted!" said the signora, in a tone of wild alarm, while Ascollini, trembling with rage and consternation, stood gazing on Cecilia with looks of fearful expectation; as, in obedience to her mother's wish, she essayed to reply; but her words were inarticulate, and her manner confused. The names of Orazio and Angelo Guicciardini were, however, sufficiently distinct; and although it was impossible to comprehend the full meaning of her expressions, yet the signora and the prior soon understood that she had seen both Orazio, and the robber Angelo, in the garden at midnight.

"Plunder—midnight assassination was

then their aim!" exclaimed the prior: "And you, weak and romantic girl, what evil spirit urged you to wander alone at such an hour? And how did you escape those ruffians?"

"Neither attempted to insult me, father," replied the trembling Cecilia.

"How!" exclaimed Ascollini — "not insult you! Holy saints!, do I live to hear Cecilia di Berlotti avow a midnight interview with robbers and assassins, and yet declare she was not insulted! Was not their presence sufficient insult to a chaste and——"

"Hold, Father Ascollini!" interrupted the signora—"The precipitancy of your nature impels you to unjust conclusions. Hear my Cecilia's detail of this singular event, and till then delay your decision."

"Decision! What other decision can I make than that which I have already pronounced. Orazio Angelo clandestinely flies from my convent; he is no where to be found; and now I hear this hapless child declare, that she beheld him and Angelo Guicciardini together at midnight! Is not this evidence of his guilt sufficient? Is it not obvious to every mind, not biassed by the most absurd prejudices, that this amiable, this all-accomplished Orazio, is a young bandit, and the pupil of that arch villain, Angelo Guicciardini? And what am I to suppose from the acknowledgment of Cecilia's being absent from her chamber at such an hour?"

Unable to excuse, or account for such a singular deviation from propriety, without avowing the cause of her having so far transgressed the bounds of decorum, Cecilia's distress and confusion increased: tears of bitter anguish and remorse fell from her downcast eyes, and she remained silent, while the signora, bending over her in an agony of maternal grief and terror, durst not urge her to speak, lest she should avow some error which could not be pardoned.

Ascollini's anger and distress now became unbounded: he reproved the easy credulity with which the Signora di Berlotti had admitted Orazio Angelo, in terms equally severe and just, till Cecilia, shocked and overwhelmed with surprise, shame, and a feeling of indignation at the invectives which he uttered, yet endeavouring to silence the keen emotions of her heart, entreated to be permitted to retire with her mother, at the same time promising to discover every secret thought of her soul, and erroneous action, to that dear parent.

Ascollini gave a silent and a sullen assent; then summoned Lodelli, who had been early dismissed from the apartment, to assist the signora in leading Cecilia to her chamber.

CHAP. XIV.

The moment Cecilia found herself alone in her chamber with her mother, she seemed to recover fortitude and calmness sufficient to give her power to enter into some explanation; and preparatory to her agitated detail, she placed the casket given her by the pilgrim in the hands of the signora, timidly requesting her to examine its contents, and to read the billet, which she now took up from off the floor, on which it had fallen on the preceding night.

The Signora di Berlotti, more intent on reading the billet than on viewing the contents of the casket, placed the latter on the table beside her, and, with eager curiosity and dread, read the lines addressed by Angelo Guicciardini to her daughter. Their import did not seem to shock her so extremely as Cecilia had apprehended they might have done; and the amiable girl felt relieved and encouraged when the signora, turning on her a look of the softest pity and affection said—

"Shall I spare my Cecilia a mortifying and distressing confession? Shall I understand from her embarrassment and tears, that Angelo Guicciardini's conjectures were founded in truth; that she became sensible of this, and, in the hurry and con-

fusion of such a discovery, could not repose, but wandered into the garden."

Cecilia's downcast eyes, varying colour, and deep emotion, confessed more than words could have done. The Signora di Berlotti folded her to her indulgent heart, while she softly, but in a tone of self-reproach, added—

"I only am to blame; but the impression made on the heart of Cecilia, while she considered Orazio Angelo as brave, amiable, and the adopted son of her mother, must soon cease when she considers the object of her predilection in the horrible character of a midnight robber, and the companion of Angelo Guicciardini."

The signora continued to sooth the spirits of Cecilia, and at length received a full detail of the events of the preceding night, to which she listened with the most attentive earnestness, but did not make any remark on the subject. This taciturnity, however, gave a keen sensation of disappointment to Cecilia. She had hoped to learn her mother's opinion respecting the solemn asseveration Orazio had made as to the cruelty of judging his conduct by appearances; and although she did not expect that the signora would express herself inclined to place any confidence in the words of Orazio, yet she felt her silence as proceeding from a conviction of his guilt; and, in consequence of this opinion, experienced a still more violent degree of self-

disapprobation for having so weakly conceived a predilection in favour of one, whose mysterious circumstances should have rendered her most careful to avoid his constant society.

While these reflexions occupied the mind of Cecilia, the signora remained for a few minutes absorbed in silent meditation. At length, starting from her reveries, she fervently kissed the tearful cheek of her daughter, and commending the ingenuous sincerity with which she had opened her heart, took up the casket.

After some trifling remark on the casket itself, which was a plain ivory one, the signora opened it; but the moment she beheld the diamond cross and pearl chain, she uttered an exclamation, and examined both that and the bracelets with an eager attention and an excessive emotion, which proved how much the sight of these ornaments interested her.

"Veronica--poor Veronica!" she sighed, as if unconscious of her daughter's presence—"when these last sparkled on thy lovely bosom and fair arms, how little didst thou dread the fate that——" Then suddenly recollecting herself, she turned towards the astonished Cecilia, and instantly replacing the jewels, and closing the casket, said—

"My inadvertence has unintentionally revealed to you, my Cecilia, that I possess a former knowledge of these ornaments. There is a sad tale connected with the ori-

ginal owners of these jewels. At some future period I may perhaps acquaint you with with the events to which my words allude. At present, I am incapable of the effort. In the mean time I will take the casket into my own possession; and should any particular occasion occur, in which you may require such splendid elegancies as these, you shall have my permission to wear them. I must now return to Father Ascollini: he is impatient for my re-appearance."

The signora arose, and, once more embracing her daughter, said, "Adieu for the present, my beloved Cecilia! Compose your spirits; and do not suffer your mind to be depressed by the consciousness of a trivial error, which your own delicacy and good sense will soon enable you to conquer. Remain for a short time in your own apartment. The turbulent agitation of the good Father Ascollini would but distress you, should you accompany me to the parlour. I will send Lodelli with your breakfast."

The signora now withdrew, leaving Cecilia much tranquillized by the influence of the calm and collected seriousness of her manner.

How powerful is the impression of that air of placid ease and cool indifference with which judicious age affects to regard the events that raise the wildest emotions in the bosom of inexperienced youth!

Cecilia, supported for a time by something of the same serenity which seemed to

diffuse itself over the mind of the signora, as she departed, began to blush at the late violence of her feelings, and instantly yielding to the impulses of imagination, fancied that she had mistaken the nature of her sentiments for Orazio Angelo, and concluded that her mother had uttered an undeniable truth when she had averred that it was impossible for her to entertain long even the least favourable opinion of that mysterious young man.

The entrance of Lodelli with a tray of the most delicious fruits which the cottage afforded, and some white bread, was now, however, a very unwelcome interruption to the reflections of Cecilia, who again began to feel the arrow of unsubdued passion rankle in her heart, as she attempted to struggle with her emotion, and essayed to taste the fruit. She was incapable of the effort, and as soon as possible dismissed the affectionate Lodelli, that she might once more be at liberty to indulge in the very contemplations which she should have sedulously banished from her mind.

Lodelli, however, had not been absent above a few minutes, ere she returned to inform Cecilia that the signora her mother requested her immediate attendance in the parlour.

This summons increased the uneasiness and emotion that agitated the mind of Cecilia; but she resolutely endeavoured to check all appearance of perturbation, and immediately descended to the parlour.

On opening the door, she perceived Father Ascollini still there. She paused, and hesitated to enter; but the father hastily advanced, and, with a look of mingled embarrassment and kindness, led her into the room, apologizing very earnestly for his recent abruptness and passion, and concluding with the most lavish commendations of her ingenuousness and prudence.

"The signora, your mother, has briefly informed me that accident, not design, led you into the garden last night," he continued; "and I cannot sufficiently approve the discretion you manifested in not replying to the rodomontade and impertinent professions of that unknown and dangerous young man."

Had Cecilia set as high an estimate on her own discretion as the Father Ascollini seemed to do, she might have been flattered by his approbation; but her ideas of her own prudence were exactly the reverse, and, while the deepest blush passed over her pale features, she disclaimed all title to his commendation, and entreated his pardon for not having placed a proper reliance on the opinion which he had originally formed of Orazio Angelo.

The dark eyes of Ascollini now seemed animated with an expression of gratified vanity, which extremely displeased the Signora di Berlotti, who perceiving Cecilia abashed at his glance, desired her to retire, giving her at the same time direc-

tions to wait with Lodelli in her apartment till she joined them.

CHAP. XV.

CECILIA had scarcely reached the chamber of the signora before she followed her thither.

Lodelli was now ordered to withdraw; and the mother and daughter found themselves once more alone.

"And now, my dear Cecilia," said the signora, "while we are free from interruption, I will commence a task which, although most painful to me to execute, I can no longer delay, as it is necessary that you should be made acquainted with the circumstances that I am about to relate."

"Oh, not for me—not for me, shall you, my dearest mother, subject yourself to the distressing feelings which you seem to apprehend this recital may cause you to suffer," said the lovely girl, while filial tenderness and concern beamed from her full expressive eyes.

"Grateful as I feel for my Cecilia's duteous and affectionate concern for my tranquillity, yet I must not indulge the repugnance I feel to enter on the detail I purpose to give her, while there exists a probability that my silence might induce her to attribute to negligence or impru-

dence an error which was the effect of the purest motives. I mean to account to you, my love, for my apparent deviation from my usual caution, in admitting to our friendship the young man who has so much distressed us by his singular and seemingly unworthy conduct. But to render my reasons more intelligible to you, I must recur to former periods, the recollection of which never fails to fill me with the deepest sorrow."

Here the tremulous voice of the signora but too truly evinced that she did indeed suffer keenly, when calling back to remembrance the occurrences to which she alluded. After a short pause, during which she appeared to recover herself, she continued:

"It is not essential that I should now enter into a long account of my own family and connexions. Every circumstance relative to ourselves you will be informed of at a proper time: suffice it to acquaint you, my Cecilia, that our ancestors were noble, their possessions large, and the splendour of their mode of living equal to their wealth and the spirit of diffusive generosity and benevolence which distinguished our house for centuries past. Of my own family, it is not, however, my intention to speak very elaborately at present. I shall therefore confine my detail to a few circumstances necessary to explain my motives for some parts of my recent

conduct. At the period to which I am about to recur, I resided with a relation at Venice; and——"

Here the signora was interrupted by the voice of Lodelli, who, timidly entering, informed her that the Signor Malvezzi was arrived, and requested her immediate presence. Agitated by this information, which was wholly unexpected, the signora arose, and merely desiring Lodelli to remain with Cecilia during her absence, hastily left the room. Cecilia, however, would have preferred being suffered to indulge her own reflections in solicitude. This visit of the Signor Malvezzi not only formed a most unpleasing interruption to the relation which the signora had but just commenced, but also excited no trifling share of surprise as to the motives that could have brought him to the cot; for between his usual visits an interval of two years had always occurred, and now a year had not elapsed since his last.

Was it possible, Cecilia thought, that his sudden re-appearance could be connected with the recent events relative to Orazio Angelo; but this was but the idea of the moment, for she was soon convinced of its absurdity. However, conjecture could give no information on the subject, and Cecilia endeavoured to check the anxious curiosity which increased the agitation of her mind; and taking up her netting, seated herself at the open casement to work.

Meanwhile Lodelli, who, with ludicrous indications of impatience, had restrained herself from interrupting the meditative silence of her young lady, now ventured to say: "The Signor Malvezzi, signora, will not now stay here a day or two, as he used to do formerly. He was in such a hurry to see my lady, that I thought he was half mad. He looked so wild, too; and said he must be gone in less than an hour, and that he had travelled all night; and, indeed, signora, he looked as bad and as tired as if he had been travelling *six* nights. Oh, my dear young lady, these are very different times from what we have been used to!

"No more comfortable quiet days, and chearful evenings shall we have now, I'm sure. Ay, ay, as the good Father Ascollini said to me, it's all over, ever since that vile young deceiver, that handsome Orazio Angelo, got admittance here. Dear signora, who would have thought, that with all his fine, innocent, noble looking countenance, he should be no better than a robber, and employed by that terrible Angelo to kill us all."

"And who said that he was employed for such a purpose?" timidly enquired Cecilia, while her varying colour spoke the emotion of her soul.

"Who says so, signora! Why, who but the holy Father Ascollini, who doesn't want for wit to find out such folks. And he says, he is sure that the robber Angelo

only chaced him into the cottage, that he might pretend they were not friends, and so impose upon the good-nature of your mamma, and to make her think him a young saint, when he is nothing but a vile sinner; and so he has at last proved himself to be, by his running away so."

The entranee of the signora now checked the loquacity of Lodelli, who was immediately ordered by her lady to withdraw.

The agitated voice and disturbed looks of the signora would have been sufficient to inform the alarmed Cecilia that her mother had just received the most unpleasant intelligence: but when the servant had retired, the signora, bursting into tears, enfolded the lovely form of her daughter; and, after weeping for a moment, in silent agony, said,

"Cecilia, my beloved child, the hour of peril is arrived!---We must part!"

"Part!" faintly exclaimed the astonished girl, while her expressive looks spoke all of grief, amazement, and terror.

"Oh, yes!" articulated the signora, in a voice almost subdued by mental anguish: "Yes; I must send thee hence to a place of safety, or ere to-morrow eve, thou wilt be torn from my arms for ever!"

"Merciful Providence! can this be so? Oh, my mother, what dreadful mystery hangs over our fate?---What compels you to this sad necessity?"

"Alas! my child, this is not a time for

explanation: every moment must now be devoted to our preservation from the worst calamity which can threaten us. Ah! whither, whither can I send thee, to conceal thee from the power of that cruel persecutor? But, forgive me—forgive my unintelligible raving, yet where——"

"If it is so essential that I must quit thee, my dear mother," said Cecilia, "may not the Father Ascollini point out some fit retreat---some convent?"

"Oh! no, no:" exclaimed the signora di Berlotti. Ascollini may not be confided in this instance, nor could any convent screen you from those whom I dread discovering you."

"But the subterraneous caves connected with this cottage, my mother---cannot I there seek security?"

"Alas! I fear not," replied the signora; "they are all known to Ascollini; and yet——" She hesitated, and then, suddenly rising, rang the bell; and, on Lodelli's appearing, ordered her to call Guispardo, and to return with him herself.

While Lodelli flew to execute this order, the signora walked up and down the room in the greatest emotion. Cecilia, trembling and more alarmed by the distress of her mother, than by any apprehensions for her own safety, sat silent, and in tears.

A few moments only passed ere Lodelli re-appeared with Guispardo. The signora paused as they entered, and turned towards the old man, who, meekly bowing, awaited in silence her commands.

The signora drew her trembling hand across her brow; a more than usual paleness was spread over her countenance, and, after a moment's reflection, she said—

"Guispardo, before to-morrow night I am to expect a visit from the Count de Weilburgh. My retreat is discovered. How shall I conceal from that monster this devoted child." And now, embracing Cecilia, who sunk on her knees before her, she wept more bitterly, while the faithful old servant, apparently as much agitated and alarmed as his mistress, wrung his hands, and uttered several inarticulate expressions of surprize and trouble. But Lodelli, though a stranger to the private history of her lady, with which it was now evident that Guispardo was acquainted, instantly proposed taking her dear young signora to the cottage of her sister, who lived in a lonely glen about three leagues distant.

"And nobody can ever find her there, my lady," said the good-natured young woman. "My sister's husband is only a poor wood-cutter, you know, madam; and who would think of looking for my dear young mistress *there?*"

The signora was too distracted in her ideas to pay much attention to the representations of Lodelli. Still bending o'er the drooping form of Cecilia, she turned her eyes, dimmed by tears of maternal love and fear, on Guispardo, and faintly pronounced, "The caves, Guispardo—hast

thou not often told me that those subterraneous mazes are so intricate, as to be impenetrable to all who are unacquainted with them?"

Guispardo started. "The caves! madam!" he tremulously repeated; and, after a momentary hesitation, added, "Dare you suffer the Signora Cecilia to venture amid those horrible recesses!—those recesses where mur---"

The Signora Berlotti now darted a look at Guispardo, which instantly silenced him, and said:

"Where else can she find security, old man?"

"True, excellentissima: 'tis there alone that my dear young lady can hope to remain concealed; therefore, when it is your pleasure, signora, that she should retire thither, I will conduct her," said Guispardo, while the solemn gravity of his tone of voice and manner, evinced how seriously he felt the mournful necessity of such a procedure.

"Then retire, and make the requisite preparations for her continuing there for a day or two," said the signora, attempting to assume the appearance of a calmness, to which she was too much a stranger; "and remember, Guispardo,---and you, Lodelli, that on your silence and fidelity in this instance, depends the safety---nay, perhaps the life, of this dear child."

Guispardo bowed in silence, while the look of reverential pity and affection which he cast on Cecilia, replied more forcibly

than language could have done, how dear to him was the safety of his lovely young mistress. As for Lodelli, awed and confounded by the wildness of the Signora di Berlotti's air, and the distress in which both herself and her daughter were involved, she could only once call all the saints to witness how silent and faithful she would be; and then followed Guispardo, to assist in the necessary preparations for the concealment of her young lady.

CHAP. XVI.

Although once more alone with her daughter, the Signora di Berlotti still found herself too much agitated, and too much under the influence of terror, to be able to speak on any other subject than that of Cecilia's temporary concealment; yet her expressions, even on this theme, were unconnected; and it was soon but too apparent that the excess of her fears had rendered her incapable of thinking reasonably, or of deciding coolly on this point. Conscious that she could not fix on any place which might afford greater security than the subterraneous retreat promised to do, she yet felt most reluctantly fearful of permitting her to retire thither, and her language betrayed all the irresolution and anguish of her mind.

Meanwhile Cecilia displayed all the

magnanimity, and mild fortitude with which the trying exigency of the moment seemed to furnish a disposition hitherto so timid and full of sensibility: she dried her own tears, to check those of her beloved parent; and while her sweetly plaintive accents were those of consolatory affection, they were also calculated to inspire hope and courage. The Signora di Berlotti gazed on her as she spoke, with all the enthusiasm of maternal admiration, and at length, with a mind calmed and invigorated by the efforts of filial love and piety, she began to speak with composure of her Cecelia's temporary continuance in the caverns; and now the lovely girl timidly ventured to ask, why her mother might receive and converse with the dreaded Count de Weilburgh, from whom she thought it necessary to conceal her daughter.

"Alas, my Cecilia," replied the signora, "unprepared for the suddenness of this terrible hour, I have neglected to inform you of the mysteries which have long banished me to this seclusion; and now I have neither time nor composure to enter into a history of my life; and a *brief* relation would not sufficiently explain to you the evils I have formerly endured, nor the cause I have for dreading that even greater ills may yet befal us But, oh! if we should meet again in safety, then I will reveal to thee, my child, the sad story of my sufferings. Enquire no further, my child; my thoughts wander. I scarcely

know what I say. Give me the only consolation which I can now know: that of making your present ease and safety my only care."

The signora now arose, kissed the pale, tear-dewed cheek of Cecilia; and commanding her not to come down stairs, withdrew, to direct Guispardo in his arrangements for her short residence in the caves.

Cecilia, now left to solitary reflection, soon experienced all the torture of unavailing conjectures and apprehensive surmises. No longer under the necessity of exerting her own spirits in order to cheer the despondent alarms of her mother, her mind yielded insensibly to the influence of the depressive consciousness of her singular situation; and a thousand images of unknown horrors crowded on her perturbed imagination. Had she known the extent and nature of what she had to dread from the Count de Weilburgh, that much-feared foe, from whose power her mother thought it so essential to protect her with so much care, Cecilia might have summoned sufficient fortitude to look with unfeigned calmness on every evil which could threaten her; but her ignorance as to what she had to apprehend added new horrors to her situation, and exposed her to all the torments which doubt and fear can inflict. But these sad reflections were not confined to her terrors of the present and the future: the past held a powerful ascendancy over the

mind of this artless pupil of sorrow; and the recollection of the few short days of transient happiness, recently passed in the society of Orazio Angelo, arose to add the bitterness of mingled regret and self-reproach to the misery she otherwise endured. The idea of the robber Angelo—his mysterious visit—his promised protection—all crowded in vivid images on her fancy, and nearly distracted her senses by the contrary emotions they excited.

Through hours of extreme misery, or extreme felicity, we are unmindful of the pace of time. Already the mellow tints of evening softened the surrounding scenery, and the fast-declining sun-beams receded from the summits of the nearest hills, ere Cecilia, starting from bewildered reveries, beheld Lodelli enter the room.

"I have brought you some refreshments, my dear young lady," said the good Lodelli, in a mournful voice: "I'm sure you will have need enough to take something before you go into that frightful place. San Antonio help us! How will you have courage to remain there by yourself, two days. My lady has sent the old couch down there, and some bed clothes, and a lamp, and plenty of oil; and Guispardo is to take some wine and provisions, when you go. But, mercy on me! you'll never be able to stay there a night. Do you think you shall, signora?

"Certainly," replied Cecilia, almost inclined to smile at the whimsical expression

of dismay which Lodelli's grotesque features exhibited. "Why should I fear? I have never injured any mortal; wherefore, then, should I doubt the protection of heaven?"

"That is very true, my dear young lady," observed Lodelli. "But, although you may not have injured any person, yet it might please heaven to try your faith by something very terrible. Now, I have never injured any person in my life, except---the saints guard us!---except, my refusing to marry Jerome, the wood-cutter, was an *injury*; and though he did go beyond sea, almost broken-hearted, for the loss of me, yet he should not have taken it so much amiss, considering that he had but one eye, and was rather bandy. And so, signora, you see I had some excuse for what I did; though, to be sure, he did threaten to haunt me, if he should die first; and I can assure you, signora, that that ill-natured threat---was it not ill-natured, signora? that threat has often come into my head when I go round by the little paling that divides the garden, just where the scare-crow is set to frighten the birds—it looks so like Jerome by moon-light."

A faint smile now involuntarily animated the features of Cecilia. "Ah, you may smile, signora," continued Lodelli; "and, bless thy sweet, innocent heart, it does me good to see thee smile, my dear young lady; and, if I can but see one such smile on

your beautiful face, when we are in those dismal caves to-night, I will not fear all the ghosts of the murdered travellers that they say walk there."

"You in the caves, Lodelli!" exclaimed Cecilia: "surely you are not to accompany me?"

"Yes, but I am, signora: the signora, your mother, did not want much pressing to give me leave to go with you, though at first Guispardo had almost made her believe, that if I was missed from the cottage, it might be the means of discovering where you were."

The opening of the door interrupted Lodelli, and the signora slowly entered.

Her tear-swollen eyes, faltering steps, and pallid looks, evinced how she had passed the afternoon. Cecilia arose, and threw herself into her mother's arms, and mingled her tears with those of this tender parent.

For some moments neither spoke. At length Cecilia tremulously said,

"Lodelli tells me, my beloved mother, that you have consented to her accompanying me to my retreat; but can you think that I can be happy in her attendance, while I know you to be alone? No, no; suffer her to remain, and attend to you in my absence. Do you think that my fancy can be affrighted by the tales of superstitious terrors attached to the subterranean? By no means. The aonviction that I have cause to dread *real* evils, will banish all

alarm of imaginary ones; and I am confident I shall not there encounter any thing which reason need apprehend."

The signora now represented to Cecilia, that Lodelli's accompanying her to the caves would give the greater appearance of truth and probability to the story of her being sent off to a convent; a deception which necessity would compel her to practise on the visitor she expected; and, as it was by no means probable that she would have gone thither unattended, Lodelli's absence would appear but proper.

Rather to ease the mind of her mother, than from any conviction of the necessity of Lodelli's attendance, Cecilia, at length, acquiesced; and, as the evening was now fast closing, the signora ordered a slight supper in her chamber, not chusing that her daughter should descend to the lower apartments, lest Ascollini should call in on his return to the priory, from visiting a gentleman who lived nearer the edge of the lake. Seated by the open lattice, the hand of Cecilia fast locked in the hand of the signora, this affectionate parent and child suffered the delicious fruits, so neatly spread on the little table near them, to remain untasted, while each, with tearful eyes, mournfully contemplated the bold and shadowy outlines of the gigantic Alps stretching along the horizon, and rearing their snowy points and rugged brows above the chesnut-covered hill, beneath which the cottage was sheltered on the north-west, while all the

nearer scenery was enveloped in the dusky shade of fast-approaching night. A more than usual silence pervaded all around: no breeze was heard to whisper amid the thick myrtles, nor wafted the perfumed fragrance of the rich flowering shrubs that encircled the cottage. The heated atmosphere seemed oppressively heavy, while the lowering hue of the heavens seemed to foretel the coming tempest.

"Cecilia!" sighed the signora, pressing more tremblingly the hand she held, "Cecilia, how awfully still—how solemn is the appearance of nature at this moment! It seems as if an intuitive voice whispered mournfully to my soul that we are on the eve of parting, never to meet again! An icy chill creeps through my veins, as the horrible anticipation of to-morrow rises to my tormented fancy: in vain, I repeat to myself the assurances of thy safety—those assurances so solemnly made me by the venerable Guispardo. I cannot banish from my mind the sickening presentiment which warns me that this is the last hour in which I shall be permitted to clasp thee to my aching bosom, and bestow on thee a parent's blessing. Yet, oh Cecilia! if, as my sad forboding heart informs me, thou shouldst be torn, by cruel hands, for ever ever from my sight——"

A loud and violent knocking at the cottage gate, and the trampling of horses' feet, now gave a dreadful interruption to the signora. She started back: a half-uttered

cry trembled on her pallid lips, and her head sunk on the bosom of Cecilia, who, losing all fear of danger in the situation of her mother, loudly called on the name of Lodelli.

This effort recalled the fleeting senses of the signora, who, now recovering, and hearing the knocking continue, wildly cried, "Fly! my child, fly!---fly to the caves: or, behold thy wretched mother expire with terror at thy feet."

Lodelli now rushed in, exclaiming, "O, I believe they are come already. Hide yourself, my dear young lady, as fast as you can: Guispardo must open the door in a few minutes, or else they will break it open."

Gasping, breathless, and with almost frantic wildness, the Signora di Berlotti again commanded the now nearly distracted Cecilia to hasten away; and the horror-stricken girl, faintly, but with eagerness, insisting that Lodelli shold remain with her mother, on whom she cast a glance of anguish unutterable, at length fled from the apartment, and, guided partly by the uncertain twilight, reached the small parlour, from whence the panneled wainscot admitted her into the small vaulted recess, where, to her inexpressible satisfaction, she found a lamp, dimly burning on the time-mossed pavement.

Rightly imputing the finding this lamp to the careful forethought of poor Guispardo, Cecilia eagerly raised it from the

ground, and lightly stepping onward, discovered the head of a deep flight of stone steps. Commending herself to the protection of Providence, and internally praying the same gracious power to aid her beloved parent in the present trying hour, she began to descend the steps, but proceeded but slowly, her way being so frequently impeded by the broken fragments of some of the half-mouldered steps, and the slimy dampness of others. At length, with considerable difficulty, she reached the termination of the steps, and found herself in a cavern, the extent of which she had no means of ascertaining, as the damp-dimmed rays of her lamp gave hardly sufficient light to direct her footsteps over the rough inequalities of the ground which was here unpaved. For some moments she continued to proceed; but soon perceiving the lamp burn brighter, and a fresher air give freedom to her respiration, she paused, and raising the light above her head, once more attempted to distinguish where she was. Still all around seemed dark and obscure: but on moving a few paces further, she observed the glittering reflection of what she justly conceived to be spars, or petrifactions, on the rugged projections of the natural roof and sides of the cavern; and on approaching nearer, she found her conjectures realized: for, in this part of the cave, a kind of natural grotto was formed by a rough, irregularly-arched recess, the interior of which, ascending in the rock, promised her some

security from the dampness which had assailed her on the earthy ground in the cavern. With a beating heart, she entered, and placing the lamp as far as possible from the entrance, she knelt, and inclining her head on a craggy fragment of rock, which seemed to have fallen from the roof, sought to quell the agonizing tumults of her mind in that never failing-resource of the pious, fervent, and sincere devotion.

CHAP. XVII.

For nearly an hour the innocent Cecilia continued to soothe the anguish and terror of her mind by prayer, and at length finding her confidence in heaven revived, and her spirits more calm, she once more ventured to look around, and attentively listened for the footstep of Lodelli, or Guispardo, one of whom she felt assured would be sent to her by her mother, as soon as the mysterious and dreaded visitor had departed. Hour after hour now passed on, and no one appeared. Cecilia still mentally prayed; but human nature is not capable of supporting terror and suspense with equal strength and fortitude for any length of time. The mind, supported by innocence and piety, may enable suffering virtue to combat with affliction; but to conquer those intervals of weakness and doubt, to which even the most pious and

resolute are too frequently exposed, is not the act of frail humanity. Cecilia raised her tearful eyes to the dark, unseen roofs of the cavern; and her imagination exalted her soul to those bright realms where the ever-watchful Guardian of the innocent reigns in glory; but still those moments of enthusiastic hope and faith were succeeded by the chilling ones of fear and doubt, and then her eye was fixed on the impenetrable gloom of the cave, and she fearfully gazed on the dismal void, wildly expecting to behold some dreadful blood-stained vision rise to her aching sight. But from these horrible fantasies she was at length aroused, by the feeble flashing of the dim flame of her lamp. Rising with precipitation, she hastened to examine it. With consternation she perceived the oil was nearly consumed, and in a few moments darkness would be added to the horrors which environed her. With trembling hands, she essayed to trim the expiring light: alas! it mocked her efforts. She replaced it, and was throwing herself in despair on the broken cragg, when the sound of a heavy foot-step caused her to turn her eyes to the entrance of the recess; and, instantly, a martial figure, whose high-plumed helmet glittered resplendent in the glare of a torch he carried, stood full in her view; and a sonorous voice, but in a low tone, pronounced her name.

A faint shriek was the only reply of Cecilia; for as the figure had bent forward

into the recess, she discovered the features of the robber Angelo Guicciardini. Insensibility succeeded this shock. Soon, however, she recovered—recovered to find herself borne swiftly through the cavern, supported on one of Angelo's athletic arms, while brandishing in the other hand the flaming torch, he illuminated the rugged earth, over which he seemed to fly.

Feebly struggling in his close grasp, but unable from terror to shriek, Cecilia attempted to free herself; but Guicciardini, pausing a moment, and perceiving that she had recovered from her swoon, murmured in a hollow whisper, while he shook the torch, to give a clearer light, and gazed on her pale features:—

"Whence this alarm——this childish fear? Have I not sworn to *protect* you; and who shall accuse Angelo Guicciardini of a breach of such a vow!—Unfortunate child! dost thou too wish to add another victim to the insatiate malice of that murderer!"

"Murderer!—Oh! my mother!" articulated the distracted Cecilia.

"Unhand me—let me fly to receive her last sigh, and perish with her!"

"Girl! girl!" now exclaimed the robber Angelo, while his gigantic form seemed dilated with emotions indescribable, and seizing her roughly by the arm—"Dost thou tempt me to annihilate thee? Be silent, and accompany me, or dread the fate that awaits thy obstinate folly. Ut-

ter but one cry.... but one complaint, and thy ruin is certain."

A loud voice, seemingly at a great distance, now resounded in lengthened echoes through the caverns. Angelo started, and instantly extinguishing the torch, once more seized the hand of Cecilia, and dragged her swiftly onward, muttering, in a low and hollow voice, threats of the vengeance that would attend her faintest cry. But terror and despair had now rendered her incapable of attending to his warnings, and she uttered a piercing shriek. The robber, starting, let go her arm, while an exclamation of wonder and rage at her temerity fell from his lips. But this instant of liberty from his rough hold, was seized by Cecilia, with an avidity of thought, which only the peril of her circumstances could inspire, and availing herself of the impenetrable darkness in which the cavern was now involved, she lightly stepped backward a few paces, and thus eluding his attempt to regrasp her arm, she fled from the spot, with a degree of fearful precipitation which added wings to her speed, and made her insensible to the difficulties, which otherwise might have impeded her steps.

Proceeding with eager haste, and unconscious of the new dangers which might assail her in the wild mazes of the extensive cavern, Cecilia still fled she knew not whither, 'till the sound of falling water, apparently at no great distance, caused her

to pause. The cataract's roar murmured loudly through this part of the cavern, but all was still dark. Perhaps some torrent, proceeding from the rocky heights above, had taken its course through the caverns, she thought, and without a light, or any clue to guide her uncertain way, was it not probable that she might meet certain death, by plunging into the hidden stream? This idea checked all hope of proceeding further, and she feared to remain where she was, lest Angelo, directed by her light-sounding footstep, had cunningly pursued in silence. Yet were she to continue on the spot, did not almost equal danger threaten her? For must she not, hid as she was in this part of the damp subterranean, where heavy vapours hung, and seemed to fore-warn her that no gleam of day had ever penetrated, inevitably perish? At length, conscious that to endeavour to proceed could not be attended with more peril than to remain where she then stood, she once more resumed her uncertain course; but her steps were now slow and cautious.

As the hapless girl wandered amid all the terrors of darkness and incertitude, she gradually lost the sound of the cataract; and after more than an hour, which to her appeared an age, spent in vain attempts to reach the rocky wall of the cavern, she thought she beheld, at no great distance, a pale gleam of light. Trembling with emotions of mingled fear and hope, she fixed her eyes steadily on the

faint ray, and after walking a few paces farther, caught a transient view of the moon, partially seen through a fissure in the rocks overhung with many a festooned wild shrub. Those only who have with devious steps trodden the uncertain abode of never-ceasing darkness, can conceive with what an emotion Cecilia continued to gaze on the bright moon-beam that penetrated the clefted rock. With eagerness she advanced to the spot, above which the opening admitted the guiding ray, and at length reached it. And here a few projecting crags, wetted by the trickling waters from a fairy spring above, terminated her course. Faint and exhausted, she now sat down, and catching a few drops of the cooling water in her hand, moistened her parched lips. This pure beverage, and a few moments rest, rather revived her, and now determining not to leave this spot, which as the moon-light entered, she was certain the broad light of day would in some degree illumine, committed herself to the further protection of heaven, and sat awaiting the return of morning. And now all the painful fears and conjectures, which her eager flight through the caverns had in some measure suspended, returned, and wearied her perplexed mind, 'till exhausted nature, unable to endure longer the continual agitation which for two successive days had deprived her of rest and repose, sunk her senses into the transient oblivion of sleep.

CHAP. XVIII.

From a heavy slumber, the innocent Cecilia was at length awakened, by the mingled voices of Lodelli and a stranger, and, on opening her eyes, beheld herself half-supported by her faithful servant, and surrounded by men, some of whom held torches, while one, whose habit bespoke the nobility of his rank, stood leaning forward, and gazing upon her with looks of earnest scrutiny.

Feebly pronouncing the name of Count de Weilburgh, Cecilia added, "Oh! spare my beloved mother, and behold me a ready sacrifice to your mysterious hatred!"

The stranger slightly started; but instantly recovering himself, gently took her hand, while he said—

"You are mistaken, young lady; I am not the Count de Weilburgh."

"Oh, no, no, signora," now said Lodelli, while she assisted the stranger to raise Cecilia, whose delicate limbs, chilled by the midnight damps of the cavern, almost refused to support her: "this good natured gentleman is not that vile, wicked Count de Weilburgh, who has so basely carried off my dear lady, and poor Guispardo."

"Carried off!" exclaimed Cecilia, wildly, "Who?—not my mother."

And her eye resting with a glance of fear-

fully enquiring meaning on the stranger, he replied,

"Alas! young lady, your mother has indeed been spirited away from the cottage; but as her old servant has been made the companion of this enforced journey, it may be hoped no serious evil is intended her."

Cecilia heard not the conclusion of the stranger's speech. Overcome by the dreadful intelligence of her beloved parent's having been forced from the cottage, she had fainted, and was now conveyed from the caverns in a state of insensibility.

When she was revived to the afflicting consciousness of her troubles, she found herself reclined on the bed in her own little room; that room which, from youth's earliest dawn, had been the scene of calm and sweet repose, 'till the entrance of Orazio Angelo into the cottage: now it was doomed to witness the sighs and tears of that keen anguish, which the recent troubles that had so suddenly involved its once happy possessor excited.

With recollection Cecilia found all the terror of her situation unfold, and wildly calling on the name of her mother, she yielded to all the excess of a grief the most poignant and unavailing. But her efforts to rise were ineffectual; the shivering chills which had struck her tender frame in the caverns, and deprived her of the power of motion, now threatened a violent fever; but by the skill of a physician, humanely summoned by the stranger, who, with his

servants, still continued in the cottage, and by the unremitted care of poor Lodelli, the dreaded consequences of Cecilia's indisposition were prevented, and on the following day she was able to rise; but the shock which her mind had received, could not be overcome, and while her youthful constitution baffled the attacks of disease, she yet laboured under the pressure of the keenest mental agony.

On awaking from the salutary sleep which the prescription of the physician had procured her, Cecilia was, at first, too languid, and her ideas too confused, to allow her to enquire respecting the reality of the cause of that sorrow, which her reviving recollection presented to her mind; but when she did at length possess the power of collectedly asking a few questions, her faithful Lodelli, shrinking from the task of replying to them, eagerly assured her that the good nobleman, who was still in the house, would tell her all that had happened.

As the senses of Cecilia grew more and more clear, she became earnest to see this stranger, of whose kindness and benevolent attentions Lodelli had at least no fear of speaking; and therefore, as soon as she was dressed, and had swallowed the draught, directed to be taken when she arose, she descended, supported by Lodelli, to the apartment where the stranger, already apprized of her intention, waited to receive her.

On entering the little parlour, where she had so often passed the calmest and happiest hours of her life in the society of her mother, Cecilia experienced the deepest emotions of sorrow; but as her nerves were in some degree strengthened by the medicine she had just taken, she possessed power to repress all violent expression of her internal conflicts, and replied, with somewhat of composure, to the compliments which the stranger, with a hesitation which she attributed to the feelings of a compassionate heart, paid her on her entrance. Soothed, and yet affected by his manner, Cecilia now ventured to say, that she had been informed by her attendant that to him she must be indebted for some information respecting the mysterious situation of her mother.

The stranger replied, that he should be happy to satisfy the eager anxiety which he perceived she suffered as to the situation of the Signora di Berlotti; but, to his extreme regret, he had but little to communicate on the subject.

"The zeal of your servant, signora," he continued, "has, I fear, led her into some unaccountable mistake. It is true, I forewarned her of the danger of alarming you by an abrupt and unguarded detail of the conduct of those who have forced your mother from her abode, but I am as utterly unacquainted with the persons and motives of those ruffians, as I am of the place to which they may have conveyed the lady.

Indeed, I did not enter the cottage 'till some hours after they had departed, and then a mere accident conducted me hither; for happening to pass near to the garden gate, which opens on the avenue leading to the road, I heard the distant cries of a female voice, and directed by those sounds of lamentation and distress, I alighted from my horse, and followed by those servants that attended me, I entered the garden, where, bound to a tree, I found your servant, who in piteous accents informed me, that her lady, the mistress of the cottage, and a male servant, had just been dragged away she knew not whither, by some gentleman, whom she called the Count de Weilburgh, and after having bound her to the tree had left her, and her dear young lady, who was hid in the caverns, to perish. How very incoherent this account was to me, you may readily suppose, signora.— However, I at length understood that you had been the chief object of the very disagreeable visitor's search; and being conducted by your servant to the entrance of the caverns, where I was informed you were concealed, I and my servants commenced our search; but were not so happy as to find you for many hours And now, young lady, I have briefly informed you of every particular with which I am acquainted. As to the motives which may have induced this unknown person to assail and carry off the Signora di Berlotti (for so I understand your parent is called) your

servant appears to be a perfect stranger to them, and therefore it is not surprizing that I cannot guess them; but if you will please to give me some accurate explanation of this affair, I will most earnestly employ my utmost interest in procuring you justice."

Disappointed, shocked, and dispirited, Cecilia drooped her head as she listened, and when the stranger concluded, had scarcely power to thank him for his benevolent offers of assistance: confessing, at the same time, that she was so totally ignorant of the private history of her mother, as to be utterly incapable of giving him any information which might serve as a clue to guide to the detection of those enemies, into whose power the signora had thus unhappily fallen.

"Then your real name, I presume, is not Berlotti, and as your mother has preserved so strange a mystery respecting her family and connections even towards you, I imagine you are not acquainted even with that to which you have any just claim?"

There was *that* in the tone of the stranger while he made this enquiry, which struck Cecilia with an undefined sensation; for the first time, she raised her tearful eyes, and regarded him with a look of awakened curiosity and attention.

The face and figure, which now met her timid gaze, was such as rivetted for a few moments her earnest observation. The stranger was standing, and his attitude

fully displayed his peculiarly tall figure, the gaunt disproportion of which involuntarily shocked the eye, while the expression of his sombre countenance now relaxed into what he intended for a smile of gentle compassion, expressed any meaning rather than that which it was intended to convey.

Nothing could exhibit a more striking contrast than the richness of his dress and the ungracefulness of his form, united with the awkward stiffness of his air, and hesitating mode of speech, which, as now turning from the fixed look of Cecilia, and again demanding whether she was acquainted with her real family name, was even more apparent than before.

His embarrassment restored Cecilia to a sense of the rude impropriety of which she had been guilty, in observing him so earnestly, and after apologizing for her not immediately replying, she added—

"I am indeed wholly ignorant of all that relates to my family; but perhaps the prior of the San Ambrose, may not be so uninformed on this subject as I am, as he was particularly distinguished by my mother, and was her confessor."

The stranger shook his head, and replied—"I have already seen and conversed with the Father Ascollini; but your mother has never reposed so much confidence even in him, as to confide to him any intelligence respecting her family, or herself, previous to her settling here. The good prior has

been inexpressibly shocked at her sudden disappearance; and, like yourself, knows not to whom to impute the cause of it. As to this Count de Weilburgh, it is a title of which I have no knowledge; nor does Father Ascollini remember ever to have heard the signora mention it: but he has spoken of a circumstance which, I am afraid, is but too nearly allied with your recent misfortune. I allude, young lady, to the imprudent fact of her having introduced to her friendship and her house a young man, whom the prior, with much seeming justice, mentions as connected with the famous robber Angelo Guicciardini; and certainly it does not seem improbable that these men may have been the cunning agents of some secret enemy, and may have betrayed her into their hands."

A thrilling horror chilled the soul of Cecilia, as the more than probability of this circumstance flashed on her mind; and in tremulous accents, she now articulated her fears, that such might have been the case, and briefly related the incidents of her meeting with, and escape from the robber Angelo, prior to her having been found by the stranger in the caverns.

As she mentioned this latter circumstance, the stranger seemed struck with the utmost alarm and agitation, and scarcely permitting her to conclude, he started up, and in a hurried manner, said, "Signora, I am astonished at your temerity! It is incredible! To have met that daring ruffian lurk-

ing in the subterranean last night, and yet continue here exposed to his attacks; nothing but madness could be guilty of such a folly! We shall all be murdered ere the morning dawns! I would not remain here another hour for the universe!"

And now, summoning his servants, he ordered every thing to be prepared for his immediate departure, while Cecilia, amazed and confounded by his reproaches, knew not what to urge in her own defence; for she easily perceived that concern for the fate of her mother, would not be a sufficient vindication of her imprudence with him; and indeed he almost immediately intimated so, by saying—

"The misfortune which has fallen on your mother, young lady, cannot justify you in exposing yourself to the hazard of falling into the power of the tremendous Angelo Guicciardini; therefore, if you will accept of the protection which I can offer you, I will immediately place you with the Marchese di Rovenza, my lady."

The entrance of Ascollini prevented the necessity of Cecilia's replying.

The prior seemed much affected. He took the hand of Cecilia in silence, and his look evinced to her how truly he sympathised in her misfortunes. She burst into tears.—Ascollini half uttered an execration, which being mingled with the name of Orazio, left her no doubt of his meaning. But the attention of the prior was soon demanded by the Marchese di Rovenza; for

so was the stranger called, who now repeated the offer he had made Cecilia, and begged the father to represent to her the propriety of immediately preparing for her departure, mentioning at the same time her interview with Angelo on the preceding night.

Astonished and surprised, Ascollini turned towards Cecilia, and required to know what the robber had said to her; but the terror of the moment had permitted her only to remember that he had attempted to carry her away through the caverns, and that she had escaped. The prior, however, appeared to think that this action of the robber's afforded sufficient cause for confirming him in his opinion, that Angelo was concerned as an agent, in the disappearance of the Signora di Berlotti; and while he raved at the imprudence of her having countenanced, even for a moment, the young Orazio, who he persisted in declaring could be nothing more than a spy or confederate of that arch robber's, he urged Cecilia to place herself under the protection of the Marchesa di Rovenza, averring, that she ought to consider herself as most particularly fortunate in finding friends in one of the most illustrious and exalted Venetian families. The father then gave her the most solemn assurances of sending her the earliest intelligence which he should happen to receive respecting the signora: and again representing, in the most forcible manner, the inutility, as

well as the danger, of her remaining at the cottage, at length prevailed upon her to assent to accompany the marchese to Venice.

Cecilia, after gracefully acknowledging the benevolent kindness of the marchese, who politely permitted her to make Lodelli the companion of their journey, withdrew, to give some orders relative to her departure, and to review a habitation so long endeared to her, ere she should deliver up the keys to the care of the Father Ascollini, who had promised to place some proper person in the cottage to take care of it, till the fate of the Signora di Berlotti should be ascertained.

An hour of the bitterest grief was now passed by the hapless Cecilia, who, while Lodelli hastily arranged the articles they meant to take along with them, visited the room of her mother, and then yielded up herself a prey to all the anguish of heart, which the idea of perhaps never more beholding that dear parent inspired.

CHAP. XIX.

At length the summons of Lodelli to attend the marchese, as all was now ready for their departure, aroused Cecilia from the indulgence of her unavailing grief. Hastily endeavouring to conquer her tears, she suffered Lodelli to adjust her dress,

and arrange the waving tresses that now no longer shaded a cheek which the warm glow of internal happiness had brightened with the roseat bloom of health; and soon her tearful eyes were concealed by a long veil, and her lovely form enveloped in a simple cloak. Thus attired, she descended to the parlour, supported by her faithful servant, whose tears now kept pace with her own.

The marchese, apparently respecting the deep grief of Cecilia, led her in silence to the carriage, into which he followed, while Ascollini assisted Lodelli into the corner she was permitted to occupy, and then repeating to Cecilia his assurances of writing to her as soon as he could obtain any intelligence relative to the Signora di Berlotti, bade his lovely pupil a most mournful adieu, and the carriage drove off.

For some hours the marchese, with an appearance of polite consideration which insensibly soothed the feelings of Cecilia, did not interrupt the sad silence which her still unsubdued affliction compelled her to observe. At length perceiving that she made several efforts to restrain her tears, he called her attention to the varied beauties of the road they were travelling, and pointing out to her notice their now near approach to the town of Sesto, informed her that he intended to proceed to Milan, where they should rest that night.

Cecilia, grateful for attentions which bespoke urbanity and sympathy, once more

attempted to appear rather composed, and partially throwing aside her veil, glanced her eyes on that part of the country within her view. The lake Maggiore, and its beautiful hills, were no longer to be seen; but a fertile plain, through which wandered the Tessino, glistening in the distance, as, winding away between its richly cultivated banks, it was partially seen amid groves of mulberries and luxuriant vineyards.

Yet, delightful as was this charming scenery, Cecilia beheld it with more than indifference. All was new to her sight, and, in the present state of her mind, she viewed the country with those sensations of mournful dislike, with which a heart ill at ease seldom fails to regard every external object: she could not therefore reply to the observations of the marchese in a tone of admiration, and he, easily penetrating the nature of her feelings, no longer demanded her opinion on the subject, and another silent interview ensued till they entered Sesto.

Here the marchese paused but for a few moments till they changed horses, while a servant summoned some of his attendants, who were here awaiting the arrival of their lord, and they then proceeded towards Milan

On leaving Sesto, the marchese accounted to Cecilia for the circumstance of some of his servants having remained there, by informing her that he had been on a visit to

a nobleman, whose villa was situated about a league beyond that town.

"And I was making an excursion on the banks of the Lago Magiore," he added, "when Providence conducted me to your cottage, just at the moment when my assistance was so much required to protect you from your foes. But, pardon me," continued the marchese, now perceiving Cecilia was much affected, "I did not intend to revert to those unpleasant circumstances. When we have reached Venice, and you may have recovered from the shock your spirits yet labour under, we will resume the subject of your troubles, that I may learn how I can farther serve you."

Cecilia attempted to express how fully sensible she felt herself of the marchese's goodness, but her thanks were not so warmly returned as they might have been, had she not fancied that she perceived an ostentatious air of extreme condescension mingling with his offers of protection and service.

The marchese bowed to her acknowledgments, and then leaning back in the carriage, seemed to fix his thoughts in meditation, while his eye rested vacantly on the passing view.

Meanwhile Cecilia yielded in silence to the anxiety and grief, with which her incertitude respecting her beloved mother filled her mind, till a sudden turn of the road gave to her view the distant summits

of the Grison Alps, towering in all the awful sublimity of light and shade which the fast-retiring sun-beams threw over their rugged outlines. Tears dimmed her sight as, with a sigh of anguish, the remembrance of how many hours she had passed contemplating with her mother at the close of day the majestic features of the Alps, which separate Switzerland from the Italian bailiwicks, beyond which St. Gothard's raised its lofty head; and with these tender recollections arose all the renewed anguish which the recent strange and dreadful circumstances had occasioned. Cecilia, drawing her veil still closer over her face, returned to the indulgence of the deep and unavailing sorrow that oppressed her heart. The marchese, however, noticed her not any further; and poor Lodelli, who still sat silent and awed in his presence, could not summon courage to address her simple efforts at consolation to her dear young mistress.

Thus the travellers continued till they reached Milan, which, however, they did not enter till after dark.

Declining the marchese's entreaties that she would sup, Cecilia immediately retired to repose, and at length her grief-wearied spirits yielded for a few hours to the influence of sleep.

At an early hour on the following morning she was summoned to resume the journey; and this day passed almost in the same silence which had marked the close

of the preceding one, the marchese now scarcely addressing Cecilia but with some necessary compliment which the circumstances of the journey required; and she was too much occupied by her sorrows to experience any painful emotion from his altering manners.

On arriving at Padua, which they reached towards the close of the day, the marchese announced to Cecilia an intention of not only passing the night there, but of remaining in the town till the next evening; adding, that his desire to visit a friend, who had a villa at a small distance, was the motive of his delay, concluding with recommending to her to keep closely to her chamber during his absence. The marchese then suffered her to retire for the night.

CHAP. XX.

The moment Cecilia had reached the apartment where she was to sleep, Lodelli carefully examined the room, and having convinced herself that it was well secured, and free from all intruders, she soon drew her young lady from the gloomy reverie into which she had again fallen, by saying—

"And now, my dear young mistress, now that I have seen with my own eyes that all is safe, I will tell you what I was afraid of:—You must know, signora, that

last night, after you had gone to bed in the inn at Milan, I went down stairs to get some supper, for I was very faint and low-spirited; and 'tis no good—no good at all, my dear young lady, for people to fret and starve themselves till they can do no good to any body, but be sad and fearful, instead of having courage to facc, or outwit their enemies: and so I went down, and the mistress of the inn made me very welcome, and set before me some fine fruit and good wine; and then seeing me look quite pleased, and eat my supper heartily, she asked me many questions about you, and seemed to know the Marchese di Rovenza very well, and told me what a fine lady the marchesa was, and what a noble looking young signor their son was, and that the Signora Ottavania Rovenza was handsome too, but not so handsome as her brother, and——"

Here Lodelli was interrupted by a slight tap at the chamber-door, and on opening it, one of the female servants of the inn entered the room with a tray of refreshments, and saying that the marchese had ordered that the young lady should have some supper served in her chamber, as she was too much indisposed to remain below, began to spread the table.

Cecilia, who did not think it proper to oppose this, desired the girl to return her thanks to the marchese, which the servant, with many curtesies, promised to do; and after delaying rather longer than she need

have done, finished the arrangement of the table, and withdrew.

When she was gone, Lodelli, who had most impatiently desired the absence of the girl, that she might renew the subject which the entrance of the former had interrupted, now so earnestly entreated Cecilia to take some refreshment, that she at length sat down to table; and, insisting that Lodelli should partake of the repast, attempted to taste the delicious fruits which seemed to have been selected to tempt her appetite; for they exceeded, in luxuriant bloom and freshness, any she had seen. During the meal, poor Lodelli, however, much as she professed to relish a good supper, was too attentively engaged in persuading her young mistress to eat, to avail herself of the present opportunity of gratifying her own appetite; and Cecilia was compelled to declare that she would not listen to the intelligence which the former was impatient to communicate, till she had taken her supper.

The repast was now soon ended; and Cecilia, rather revived by the salutary refreshment she had partaken, felt a degree of interest as to what Lodelli had to relate, to which she had been a stranger during her late anxious and distressing contemplations; and this interest was momentarily increased by the hesitation of Lodelli, who was so pleased at seeing Cecilia look more composed, that the latter had occasion more than once to remind her faithful ser-

vant of the lateness of the hour, ere she could check her joyful comments on her own more placid appearance. At length Lodelli, whose lively dark eyes glistened with delight, as she affectionately watched every turn of Cecilia's looks, said—"Yes, my dear young lady, now that you begin to look something like yourself again, I will tell you all about what I heard—ay, ay, you will then see that my advice, silly as I am, is not to be despised, and that people mustn't let their hearts sink, if they want to get through this world. But where was I? O! I believe I was saying, signora mio, what a fine family the Marchese di Rovenza has! Ay, that was it. There's the marchesa herself, and her son, and her daughter, the Signora Ottavania. Yes, it is Ottavania they call her—I remember her name, because they told me she was very proud, and that the marchese, her father, doats on her for all that. Isn't that odd, signora? How can any one like a person that is very proud! I remember my poor father, and he was very 'cute and knowing, I assure you, signora: my father used to say that none but fools were ever proud; for let them be as great and as grand as they will," says he, "they must all die at last, and what are they the better than other folks then? for what signifies a fine tomb? We shall rest as quietly under a green turf, as they under a marble sepulchre; and as for their souls, I believe they would be glad enough to be

in many a poor man's place, that they have huffed about and kept down low enough in this world. But this does not signify as to what I have to say, signora; and as I was going to tell you before, they say that the Signora Ottavania is as proud as Lucifer, and wouldn't so much as look at any body that wasn't as grand as herself for all the world. Now, when I heard this, I began to think that when we got to the marchese's fine pallazo at Venice, may be this Signora Ottavania might be shewing of her airs to you, and I could hardly help crying for spite at the very thought of it."

"For spite, Lodelli!" said Cecilia.

"Yes, for spite, signora; and is it not enough to make me, when I'm sure, though I don't know rightly who you are, my dear young lady—when I'm sure that be she as grand as she may be, she can't be grander than you are; for I heard the strange, wicked count, that came to our cottage to run away with your mamma—I heard him with my own ears call her *countess*—the Countess di Ver—Ver—Ver—dear, dear me, I can't remember the rest; but it was Ver something. However, you know, signora, that doesn't much signify. The signora, your mother, was a *countess*, and that's enough. Now, if that proud signora ever——"

"Hush! my good Lodelli," interrupted Cecilia, who was now become most anxiously attentive to the circumstance of the

Count de Weilburgh having addressed her mother in such a style: "your zeal for my feelings renders you incapable of recounting to me those facts which I am most earnest to hear. The Signora Ottavania will not certainly be so unmindful of her own dignity as to insult one who is under the protection of her parents."

"I can't say, signora; I don't know as for that. Some people are such fools that they are proud of being called proud; and, after all, they know no more about what a proper pride is, than I do about Greek; and while they are shewing off their impudence and silliness, they think themselves greater and wiser than all the rest of the world. But, as I was saying, my dear signora, I could have cried with spite at the thought of what you might suffer, and was just going to say that you was quite as grand as the Signora Ottavania herself, and that you wouldn't take any of her airs, when—holy San Pietro! a man walked into the room, and asked the mistress of the house about some ices and preserves that the marchese had ordered; and as he was a talking, I looked up in his face, and was almost frightened to death; for he was the very image of one of those ill-looking ruffians that helped to carry off Guispardo. I thought I should have swooned away quite dead. Oh, signora! I remembered how he seized poor old Guispardo by the throat, and swore he'd strangle him if he made any noise.." And Lodelli did

indeed now shudder even at the recollection. "Well, I looked at the man while he was ordering these ices, and at last he looked at me; but he did'nt seem a bit surprised; only he looked a little foolish, I thought; but that might be with my staring at him so; and then he went out of the room directly, and I recovered, and asked how long he had lived with the marchese. 'Many years, I believe,' said the woman: 'at least, I have seen him as long as I have kept this house, and that is twelve years last St. Jerome's day; and I think nobody has more right to know the marchese's people; for he passes this road very often, visiting one great person or another. But what makes you so inquisitive about Signor Fabricio?' asked she. "I did'nt know what answer to give, she took me up in such a hurry; and so I pretended I was sleepy, and would go to bed; and so I stole away to your room, ma'am, and slept in the chair, you know, all night; for I was terribly afraid that Fabricio might carry you off too."

Lodelli now paused; but the incident she had last been relating had made so deep an impression on Cecilia's mind, that the latter was too much occupied by the sudden and alarming surmises which crowded on her fancy to be able to make any comment on the subject. This beginning reverie was, however, quickly interrupted by Lodelli, who now significantly rejoined:

"And now, signora, if this Fabricio

should be the very person who helped to carry off my lady and Guispardo, how comes he to be in the service of the Marchese di Rovenza, unless the marchese is a friend to the Count de Weilburgh, and knows all about it; and if that's the case, I'm sure, my dear young lady, it's no time to give way to grieving and pining, when one should be thinking how they could get out of such bad hands."

The rationality of this last observation caused the blush of self-reproach to mantle on the pale cheek of Cecilia; and even while her mind was agitated with the mingled feelings of grief and surprise, she yet admitted the full conviction of the weakness of yielding to an unavailing grief, which had not only blinded her reason so far as to incapacitate her from making the necessary observations on her own situation, but was also likely to deprive her of the power of exerting herself to discover the fate of her beloved mother.

This last idea awakened energies in the heart of Cecilia, of which till this moment she knew not that she was possessed; and while a tear of regret lingered on her cheek, for having suffered a blameable despondency to steal over her spirits, she raised her eyes to heaven, and mentally implored that confidence in the protection of Providence, and strength of mind, which were so requisite to console and support her in the trial which apparently awaited her fortitude. After a few minutes' silence,

she desired Lodelli to describe the person of the servant whom she supposed to resemble the man concerned in the outrage which had been practised at the cottage.

"The Signor Fabricio, as he is called," returned the young woman, in a tone of ludicrous peevishness, "is not over-tall; but he looks big and strong: one of his shoulders seems a little higher than the other, and he stoops rather: his complexion is an ugly dark one, and he has a hooked nose and a long chin; and one of his little, sharp, black eyes looks a bit bigger than the other; but for that I won't be quite certain; for he winks so slily with the least eye, that, maybe, he only closes it to make him seem the more cunning."

"And were you sufficiently composed, during such a scene of horror as that which occurred at the cottage, to make these minute observations on the face and figure of this man, Lodelli?" inquired Cecilia, with a look that spoke her incredulity of her attendant's discernment and memory.

"At the cottage, signora!" now stammered Lodelli, rather embarrassed by the penetrative glance of her lady—"O dear, no: I did'nt say that I had such a full view of him at that time: only when I saw him last night, he seemed altogether so like the man that half choked Guispardo, that I could'nt help thinking that this Signor Fabricio was the same, although his dress did make him look somewhat different."

Cecilia, who now very rationally conjec-

tured that the fears and zeal of Lodelli had led her into a culpable mistake, represented to her the improbability, nay even absurdity, of supposing, that, had the marchese been concerned in the late unfortunate affair, he would ever permit one of his own domestics to become an agent in a transaction of such a nature.

Poor Lodelli at length confessed the possibility that she might have been mistaken, and promised to be more cautious for the future; and Cecilia, unwilling to prolong the conversation, retired to take a few hours' repose. To sleep, however, she soon found, under such circumstances, impossible; and the hours usually dedicated to rest she now devoted to a deep and heartfelt consideration of the probable situation of her beloved mother, and her own strange destiny. Happily for Cecilia, the idea that the signora might have more to dread from the rage of her foe than imprisonment in a convent, or in some other secluded retreat, had never entered her mind; for, believing herself to be the chief object of the Count de Weilburgh's malicious persecution, she had imagined that he would merely confine her mother, till he could make a more successful attempt to secure her own person.

As to the mistake that had led Lodelli to suggest the possibility of the Marchese di Rovenza's being concerned in assisting the plans of the Count de Weilburgh, nothing could appear to Cecilia more absurd;

yet still the idea had left a faint impression on her mind; and although she could not indulge any suspicion of that nature, yet she still felt inclined to regard the conduct of the marchese respecting herself in a singular light; and even while she yielded to the best emotions of gratitude for the protection afforded, involuntarily she experienced irresistible sensations of fear and distrust.

In vague and unsatisfactory reflection she passed the hours, till at the approach of dawn she sunk into unquiet slumbers, haunted by frightful images of the past. From these distressing visions she was at length awakened by Lodelli, who, most unwillingly obeying a message from the marchese, was now compelled to disturb her lady, to inform her that his excellency was preparing to go out to pay a visit to his friend, and requested to have her assurances that she would not leave her apartment till his return.

Cecilia immediately gave the desired acquiescence to the wishes of the marchese, and had breakfast made in her room.

The marchese, however, was but a very short time absent; and, on his return, gave orders for his immediate embarkation for Venice; the friend whom he wished to see being then absent from Padua.

Cecilia was soon ready to attend the summons of her new protector, who now received her with a complacent urbanity of manners which he had not displayed on the

preceding day. No particular conversation took place after they had embarked; and the mind of Cecilia was so much occupied by the unhappiness she endured on her mother's account, and the peculiarity of their circumstances, that she found no attractions in the beautiful prospects which courted her attention from the banks of the Brenta; nor could even the first view which she beheld of Venice excite in her sad bosom those sensations of wonder and admiration which, in happier moments, she might have experienced. But, alas! she was now approaching this singular and magnificent city, oppressed with the heart-rending recollection that her beloved mother had informed her that Venice was once the place of her residence, and possibly at a period when she was surrounded by all the charms that rank, splendour, and wealth could bestow. The trembling girl shuddered, as she vainly asked herself what dreadful circumstance could have banished her parent from such a home; and now, for the first time, the probability that she might have some relations in Venice occurred to her mind. This idea gave rise to others of the most agitating nature, which alternately coloured her cheek with the flush of hope, or with the pale hue of doubt and fear: but soon her feelings subsided into the chilling calm of despondence, at the conviction that she had not the power of claiming the protection of any of her relatives, if indeed any of them might

be inclined to succour her—a circumstance which she apprehended, from the isolated state of her mother, she could have but small reason to hope for.

Such were the mournful and embarrassing reflections which caused the hapless Cecilia to pass over with vacant eye the view of those splendid palaces which, on entering the grand canal, offered to her sight all the graces of architecture: their balconies and porticoes were, however, now deserted, except by a few domestics; for the sun still shone in full splendour, and the owners of those elegant mansions had retired to repose till his influence should be abated.

At length Cecilia was aroused from her distressing reverie by the marchese, who, suddenly informing her they were just on the point of landing, directed her attention towards the wide terrace and marble colonades of a magnificent palace, which he announced to her, as belonging to the pallazo di Rovenza; and, in the next moment, the boat stopped before the steps of the terrace. A throng of domestics now approached; and the marchese, taking the hand of Cecilia, led her through a noble vestibule into an apartment, where he, with an air of much politeness, requested she would wait the attendance of the female superintendant of his household, who should be immediately sent to her, while he himself should proceed to inform the marchesa and her daughter of the circumstances

which had induced him to offer her the protection of his family.

Cecilia bowed in token of acknowledgment, and the marchese withdrew: but she felt such a painful sense of her situation increasing on her mind, that she could now scarcely restrain the tear that would have relieved her oppressed spirits. In the effort to repress her emotions, she cast her eyes round the apartment; but every mark of elegance and wealth which now met her gaze, served only to heighten a disgust of those splendid externals which can neither reward the virtues of, nor bestow happiness on their possessors.

Unaccustomed as was Cecilia to the view of rich damask hangings, golden tripods, large mirrors, painted ceilings, and all the furniture of highly ornamented apartments, it is not surprizing that they should possess few attractions in the eyes of one, who, had her mind been even free from the heavy depression which at that moment preyed upon it, would have accounted the most stately edifice, with all its luxuries, a far inferior residence to the humblest cot, unless inhabited by peace and virtue.

The opening of the door, and the entrance of a respectable looking woman, whose aged countenance instantly struck Cecilia as expressive of meekness and good nature, relieved the latter from the painful necessity of seeking to calm her perturbation by the contemplation of uninteresting objects.

Berina, for so was the housekeeper called, addressed the young stranger with an air of respectful kindness, and informed her, that she had been directed by the marchese to conduct her to a chamber, as the marchesa, and the signora her daughter, had not yet arisen from their siesta.

Cecilia rose, and was conducted by Berina across the vestibule, and up a spacious marble staircase into an elegant chamber: and now the housekeeper, suddenly recollecting herself, apologized for not having requested to know whether the young signora wished for any refreshments; but Cecilia speedily relieved the confusion of the good woman, by assuring her that she had not the least inclination for any; and then, after timidly recommending Lodelli to her care, begged that her servant might be sent to her apartment, as soon as she had rested and refreshed herself. "But do not inform her that I want her attendance before she has eaten," added the admirable Cecilia, "lest her eagerness to obey my wishes, should induce her to hurry;"

"Ah, young lady," exclaimed Berina, "your consideration for a poor servant is such a proof of a good and tender heart, and a sweet and tender disposition, as few can shew now-a-days, I fear:" and the good woman withdrew, with a look indicative of so much admiration and pleasure, that Cecilia remained confused and blushing at her commendation; yet she felt involuntarily gratified by those praises which

evinced a sensibility of what was just and proper in the mind of the person who had uttered them, even while it brought an almost instant conviction to the mind of Cecilia that the happiness or ease of the Marchese di Rovenza's domestics was not particularly attended to by some parts of his family; else wherefore should Berina perceive any merit in what this amiable girl considered as the most pleasing of her duties—the sweet task of endeavouring to make every one around her as comfortable and happy as she could.

CHAP. XXI.

Cecilia did not long await the appearance of Lodelli, who, in less than a quarter of an hour, entered the room, with a countenance which expressed a whimsical mixture of half-pleasant, half-vexatious feelings, while she exclaimed, "Ah, signora, how could you serve me so? How could you desire Berina to make me eat heartily, and enjoy myself so, when you were sitting here all alone, so patient and so sad, without any body to comfort you, or keep you company; and without any refreshment too, after all you have suffered?"

Cecilia now assured Lodelli that she had not felt the least appetite for any thing, and then inquired whether the Marchesa

di Rovenza had yet quitted her apartment?

"No, signora, her excellenza has not; but her principal woman has just been summoned; and Berina says, it will not be many moments before her lady will be in one of the saloons.

A trembling anticipation of the interview, which was now fast approaching, between herself and the marchesa, seized the mind of Cecilia, who could scarcely refrain from shedding the involuntary tears that now half dimmed her sight; but instantly the recollection of her mother's uncertain and fearful situation occurred, and she resolutely sought to quell the rising agitation, which threatened entirely to overwhelm her spirits; and directing Lodelli to adjust her dress, she prepared to attend the expected summons, with as much composure as she could assume.

Lodelli, who, notwithstanding all her native simplicity, was not a stranger to the influence of first impressions, now hastily opened the box which contained her young lady's unadorned wardrobe, and selected that which she knew became her best; and then assisting Cecilia in the arrangement of the bright and waving tresses which hung neglected on her fair brow, entertained her meanwhile with the observations which she had already made on some of the numerous household of the Marchese di Rovenza.

"It is easy to see, signora," continued Lodelli—"it is quite easy to see, that not one of the servants love any of the family, except it be the marchesa and the Signor Leonardo; for they say he is not half so proud as the signora, his sister, is; and though he is terribly passionate sometimes, yet, for all that, he is not ill-natured; for he is quite sorry when the fit is over, and will make any recompense in his power. But that is not the case with the Signora Ottavania, they tell me; that is, she never seems in such great passions as the signor, but she never forgets or forgives any one who offends her; and although she can be as rude and as cross as she pleases to others, yet she'll never suffer any body to resent it, if she can help it. Ah! my dear young lady, if you could but have seen Roberto the butler, just now, as he was giving me a cup of the best wine, look so pitiful, when Berina was saying what a sweet, beautiful young creature, so mild, and so gentle you seemed to be. Oh! if you had but seen him, how he shook his head, and said he was sorry for it, as he was sure you wouldn't be long happy here, you would have thought him a good-natured soul, signora! However, they say my lady marchesa is very good; and so, my dear young lady, I will hope you won't be quite so unhappy as one might almost fear you must be, if one was to let one's fears overcome one."

Cecilia, who had listened to the begin-

ning of this speech of Lodelli's with no very agreeable sensations, was rather gratified by the conclusion, as it represented the marchesa as free from the defects which characterised the rest of the family; yet she experienced no small degree of surprise at the freedom with which the domestics had delivered their opinions to Lodelli, who was a stranger to them; but, on remarking this to the latter, she immediately replied—

"O dear signora, they don't think I will tell; and it was only after I had told Berina how kind you were to me, that they began to talk; and I can promise you, my dear young lady, that if the marchese and his family are not loved, they are feared enough by the servants; and you know, signora, when people make themselves more feared than loved, they are soon hated; and then other folks are seldom given to say much in their favour."

Cecilia made no remark on this observation of Lodelli's, but she silently acquiesced in its truth, from the certain conviction that by kind and conciliating manners alone we can secure the affection and gratitude of good hearts, or soften the malevolence of bad ones. Her thoughts now quickly reverted to her beloved mother, and her eyes filled with tears of grief and tenderness, while she remembered the placid dignity, the condescending sweetness, with which she had ever treated her domestics.

"Ah, signora!" sighed Lodelli, as she watched the varying expression of Cecilia's features, "you are thinking of my dear lady, the signora, your mother. Ay, ay, she was a pattern of goodness, indeed; and if one was sometimes awed-like by the fine, grand air she had, one had nothing to do but look in her face, and then her beautiful smile, so sweet, but so mournful, made one love and respect her from one's heart. But don't cry, my dear young mistress; pray now don't fret so," continued this affectionate servant, even while her voice was broken with struggling with her own tears; then endeavouring to change the subject, she added: "But I have not told you, signora, what was said of my lord the marchese."

Cecilia attempted to check her grief, and Lodelli proceeded:—

"Do you know, signora, that they say the Marchese di Rovenza is of such an odd kind of a temper, that nobody could ever tell what to make of him; and they say that——"

The sudden entrance of Berina, to announce the Marchesa di Rovenza's wishes to see Cecilia, immediately interrupted, and closed for the present, the communications of Lodelli.

Cecilia now hastily finished dressing; and the little bustle which her not being quite ready occasioned, relieved her spirits from some part of the timid embarassment and distress which, at her time of life and

in such circumstances, it was impossible for her not to feel.

"Is the marchesa alone?" she inquired.

"No, signora," replied Berina; "the marchese, the Signora Ottavania, and the Signor Leonardo, are likewise in the saloon."

Cecilia secretly wished that the marchese only might have been present: however, she was reconciled by the idea that the marchese's family alone were waiting her introduction.

Her dress being fully adjusted, she suffered Berina to conduct her to the vestibule, where one of the marchesa's male domestics waited to announce her.

The folding doors of a magnificent apartment were now thrown open; and the moment "the young lady" was announced, the marchese eagerly stepped forward, and, taking her hand, led her into the saloon, at the upper end of which appeared the Marchesa di Rovenza seated, her son, leaning over the back of her chair, conversing with her, and the Signora Ottavania, half reclining on a sofa, at a small distance.

As the marchese approached, leading in Cecilia, the marchesa arose, and Leonardo retreated a few paces; while Ottavania, half starting from her position, surveyed the lovely young stranger with a scrutinizing stare of surprise, curiosity, and rising envy. The looks of Leonardo partook equally of amazement; but pleasure and admiration were as fully visible in his

glances; while in the mild eyes of the marchesa gentle pity and benevolence were predominant; and she received the young Cecilia with all that sweetness and grace which spoke at once the excellence of her heart, and the polished elegance of her manners. It was, however, an elegance of manner resulting more from a mind highly cultivated, and good sense refined by sensibility, than from the attainment of artificial and studied graces. There was, indeed, something so affectingly kind in the reception which the timid Cecilia experienced from the marchesa, that the latter could scarcely restrain the grateful tear which trembled beneath her downcast eyelashes, as that amiable lady promised her not only her protection, but gave her assurances that every possible exertion should be made to discover the situation of her mother, and to punish the enemy, who had so daringly dragged her from home But if Cecilia had thus just cause for indulging hopes of future happiness from the gentle goodness of the Marchesa di Rovenza, she had, however, no occasion for self-congratulation in experiencing any mark of consideration from the Signora Ottavania, who, when the marchesa introduced her new young *protegée* to the notice of her daughter, coldly bowed her head, and by a stubborn and formal silence, fully signified, that it was not her intention to honour the young unknown with any portion of her friendship. Not so the Signor Leonardo; his

animated looks and words, as he ventured to add his assurances to those of the marchesa respecting the measures about to be commenced for the discovery of the Signora di Berlotti, evidently betrayed how lively an interest Cecilia had already excited in his breast. The Signor Leonardo's professions of his wishes to serve her, Cecilia could, however, have sincerely dispensed with; for she felt both confused and hurt at his manner of address, which, though intended to be perfectly polite, was yet tinctured with a degree of assured confidence, not less new than disagreeable to the chaste and delicate mind of the lovely object of his but too apparent admiration.

But if the manners of the marchesa, and those of her son and daughter, were so dissimilar from her own, their appearance was hardly less so. The marchesa was tall, and her figure still displayed some faint traces of the symmetry and elegance which had once distinguished it; but sorrow, more than time, had robbed it of those charms; while from her once lovely countenance was fled every attraction but those that result from the expression which mind alone can give, when youth and bloom are wanting. Still this amiable lady was highly interesting; and the gentle dignity of her air, the pensive sorrow of her looks, and her sweet-toned voice, seldom failed of producing an irresistible effect on those who possessed discernment and sensibility to discover and appreciate

her worth. Far different from that of the marchesa was the person of Ottavania. The latter was indeed tall and well-shaped; but there was a stiff, masculine formality in her air, which disgusted the eye of the beholder, and instantly conveyed the idea of an arrogant, unfeeling disposition, while her round dark eye was wholly destitute of any expression of softness or sensibility. Her eye-brow, however, which crossed her contracted forehead in straight lines, she carefully concealed with her hair, which was dark; and thus, by screening from observation that most marking of the features, she disguised some of the harshness of the rest: her complexion was rather sallow, but a high colour took from this defect. On the whole, the Signora Ottavania would have been rather a striking figure, had not the air of awkward *hauteur*, which distinguished her, rendered her an object of disgust rather than of admiration.

The signora, however, could on some occasions array her countenance in smiles; and it sometimes happened that those superficial observers, whom it was her desire to please, had often been deceived into an opinion that she was a lively, good-natured girl, till experience taught them to the contrary, which seldom failed to be the case when she had no longer any motive for wishing to secure their esteem. But as the development of her character will fully take place in the incidents hereafter

related, it is time to speak of the Signor Leonardo. This young man was, as he had been represented to Lodelli, violent in his passions, yet generous and easily appeased: but still he was a slave to the impulse of the moment, and, in consequence, was alternately guilty and repentant twenty times a day. In his person he possessed an evident superiority over his sister; for his form was symmetrical, and his air easy—of course, graceful: his countenance was both handsome and expressive; and if his large dark eyes were but too often lighted up with the fire of wrathful passions, they as often expressed all the sadness of regret, and the imploring look of sorrow. In fact, Ottavania was depraved in heart and principles, and therefore systematically wicked; while Leonardo, from a wrong course of education, and uncorrected habits, was in all things the slave of impetuous feelings.

Into such a family the introduction of a lovely young female, such as was Cecilia di Berlotti, could not fail of being a circumstance both dangerous for and unpleasant to herself, as she could not escape being the object of the affected contempt and real envy of such a being as Ottavania, nor one of attraction to Leonardo, who had hitherto known no curb to his wishes.

The artless Cecilia, however, foresaw not all these probable hazards and vexations; and although hurt and embarrassed by the chilling insolence of the Signora

Ottavania's looks and manner, she yet experienced so soothing a gratification from the tenderness of the marchesa, that she half resolved not to suffer the silly and contemptible pride of her daughter to disturb her spirits.

After the ceremony of introduction was over, and Cecilia had learnt from the expressions of the marchesa, that that lady was already informed of every particular relative to her situation which was known to the marchese, and had made her acknowledgments for those professions of friendship and protection which were now lavishly bestowed upon her, she arose to withdraw; but the marchesa entreated her to resume her seat, adding, " The marchese, and my son and daughter, are engaged for the evening; and as I am not well enough to join the party, I shall feel myself relieved by your society from a solitary and melancholy evening. Besides, my young friend, I must not permit you to fly to the indulgence of the grief and anxiety which, the marchese assures me, have depressed your spirits during your journey hither."

Charmed by the complacent mildness of the marchesa's manner, Cecilia instantly declared that nothing could so effectually contribute to soothe her own troubles, as the being permitted to be near her amiable protectress.

While Cecilia spoke, the eyes of Leonardo were rivetted on her lovely and ex-

pressive countenance, now animated by the warm emotions of gratitude; and as, with increasing surprise, he marked the unaffected gracefulness and ease of her demeanor, he almost exclaimed aloud: "Can this be the country girl from the banks of the Lago Maggiore?" But what involuntary respect prevented him from uttering, Ottavania soon expressed by saying:—"Pray, young woman, had you no other instructor in your cottage than your mother?"

Infinitely more hurt by the rudeness of this address than was the blushing Cecilia, the marchesa, darting a glance of reproof at her daughter, said: "The superior intellectual knowledge and rare accomplishments of the Signora di Berlotti would have rendered any other instructor than herself unnecessary to this lovely young lady; but you will recollect, Ottavania, that the marchese has informed us, that the Signora Cecilia had another preceptor in the prior of St. Ambrose, and is therefore, no doubt, well informed on subjects to which we are strangers."

Ottavania, colouring highly, arose, and walked towards the door, while, with the sneer of malicious envy distorting her lip, she said: "I really did not mean to offend the Sig—no—ra Cecilia" (and she drawled the word *signora* in a tone of contemptuous bitterness), "by any intimation that I doubted the perfection of her accomplishments." Then with an insolent glance at

the now astonished and confused object of her spleen, she haughtily brushed from the room, instantly followed by her brother, whose voice, raised high in the accents of indignation, left no doubt that he had quitted the apartment to reproach her for the mean insolence of her conduct.

The distress and embarrassment of Cecilia were so much heightened by hearing the Signor Leonardo's reproving tones echoing through the lofty vestibule, that she was nearly unconscious of the slight apology which the marchese now made to her for his daughter's behaviour; nor was it till after he had withdrawn, to endeavour to terminate the dissension between the brother and sister, and that she found herself alone with the marchesa, that she recovered in some degree from the surprise and perplexity into which she had been thrown. But the tremulous voice of the marchesa soon awakened all her feelings, and as she now raised her eyes to the face of that amiable woman, and beheld the tears of shame and displeasure fall on her pale cheek, she forgot the insult she had received; and, with an almost filial tenderness, essayed to sooth the wounded spirits of this but too evidently unhappy parent.

The marchesa received these consolatory attentions with looks which testified the grateful satisfaction of her heart, while yet, in low and broken accents, she continued to apologize for her daughter, who,

she lamented, had been most fatally fixed in error by the uncontroled indulgence of the marchese.

Cecilia listened in silence and surprise: she could not palliate what it was impossible not to condemn; and she felt inexpressibly shocked at the conviction that any other sentiments but those of affection and respect for each other could exist in the bosoms of such near relatives.

From the painful necessity of replying to the marchesa on such a subject, she was soon relieved by the re-appearance of the Signor Leonardo, who, with a countenance still crimsoned with his recent angry feelings, entered the room, and saying, he was the bearer of Ottavania's regrets for the temporary impetuous rudeness she had been guilty of, offered apologies in her name to his mother and Cecilia.

The marchesa turned away with a sigh, which seemed to say she derived little pleasure from excuses for a conduct which would be soon repeated, while Cecilia timidly assured the signor that she could not possibly consider the inadvertence of the signora as an intentional offence, and therefore was perfectly inclined to remember it no more. Leonardo gazed on her with rapture, while he exclaimed: "You are all goodness; gentle, and indulgent yourself, you merit, signora, the highest respect and consideration from others; and, certainly, my sister can never more forget

that by such conduct she cannot humiliate you, but must inevitably sink herself even below contempt."

He then turned towards the marchesa, and after informing her that the marchese and Ottavania had already entered their gondola, and waited his attendance, gracefully bade his adieu, and departed; but the lingering glances with which he regarded the unconscious Cecilia, fully betrayed the regret he experienced at being compelled to quit her society so soon.

CHAP. XXII.

For some moments after his departure, neither the marchesa nor Cecilia spoke. At length, the former, evidently recovering from the melancholy perturbation which she had struggled to endure while there was a possibility of Ottavania's returning into the apartment, said: "And now, my amiable Cecilia—now that I am blest with the certainty of a transient hour of freedom from almost incessant cause for vexation and trouble, will you retire with me to those apartments more peculiarly my own, and indulge the anxious curiosity of my sorrow-weakened mind, by recounting to me some particulars of your early years? I mean your usual mode of life—studies and amusements. I do not fear to suffer you to speak to me on these subjects. It

is true, they may recal in you a thousand tender and interesting recollections; but to a well-regulated mind, the remembrance of a virtuous and happy childhood is a luxury which cannot be embittered with vain regrets, when we consider that it is our duty to receive the cup of sorrow with resignation from the hand of that Being from whom we have also received the cup of blessing."

Cecilia silently acquiesced in the justice of the marchesa's pious observations; but the recollection of her happy years of childhood, and her present situation, formed so sad a contrast, that she trembled at the task of detailing circumstances so deeply interesting to her heart, lest she should find herself utterly incapable of subduing those keen emotions of sorrow and regret, which she well knew a recital of past events must excite in her breast. But Cecilia was equally incapable of refusing the first request of the marchesa, and therefore she hesitated not to declare her readiness to comply with that lady's wishes.

The marchesa then arose, and affectionately taking the hand of her young *protegée*, led her through the vestibule, and up the marble stairs, to an elegant suite of rooms. Several female attendants were in waiting in the anti-room; and in the next apartment a collation of fruits, sweetmeats, ices, and coffee, was served. Of these refreshments Cecilia partook with the mar-

chesa; after which they retired to the dressing-room beyond the magnificent bed-chamber of the amiable lady of the mansion.

"Here," said the marchesa, as she motioned to Cecilia to take a seat beside her on a sofa, placed near one of the windows which admitted a partial view of the canal, and the opposite palaces, through the flower-scented branches of numerous exotics which, ranged in marble vases, adorned the gilded balconies: "here we shall be free from all intruders; and by an unreserved and mutual communication of our thoughts, cement that friendship which the disparity of our ages will not prevent our indulging; for I feel assured that the mind of Cecilia di Berlotti seeks more in friendship than the mere interchange of those trivial sentiments which but too often form the basis of youthful confidence. What say you, my young friend?"

"What *can* I say, madam? What language could do justice to the feelings which your condescending goodness inspires me with? Unknown and unfortunate as I am, I am not more sensible of the high honour your friendship confers on me, than I am grateful for that tone of benevolent kindness with which you deign to address me; while your eyes, beaming benignant compassion, assure me that I have every thing to hope for my mother and myself from the sincerity and ardour of the friendly sentiments which you so graciously profess for me."

The marchese smiled. "Ah!" she exclaimed: "if my little *protegée* should think many more such speeches necessary to make me understand her feelings, I shall half suspect that her holy tutor was not deficient in the art of delicate flattery. But, to be serious, Cecilia," she added, "I will make no more *professions* of the esteem and affection which I already feel for you; and so now we will dismiss the subject, and you shall briefly relate to me the manner in which you have hitherto passed your days." The marchesa then asked numerous questions concerning the usual habits of the Signora di Berlotti and her family; and, from the answers of Cecilia, soon learned, that amid all the mysterious silence which her mother had in general thought proper to observe respecting her real name and family, she had, however, educated her daughter in a manner which would render her capable of filling the most exalted station.

Cecilia, who had expected that she should have been under the necessity of entering into a long and painful detail of every incident of her early life, felt considerably relieved by the well-managed enquiries of the marchesa, who, when she found her young *protegée* tempted, by the tenderness of fond regret, to dwell longer than was necessary on some points, always diverted her attention by some new question, thus preventing the full influence of those affecting recollections which sprung

to the heart of Cecilia, as she tremulously told of some instance of maternal love, of piety, of charity, and kindness, which, while they portrayed the character of the Signora di Berlotti in the most amiable light, failed not to convince the marchesa that she deserved all the tender enthusiasm of the filial love with which her daughter mentioned her name. When, however, Cecilia, in lower and more hesitating accents, spoke of Orazio Angelo's introduction to the cottage, and, with pallid looks denoting fear, described the robber Angelo, and his singular conduct, the marchesa could no longer, notwithstanding her nice discrimination, define the feelings of her young *protegée*, in the expression of whose varying countenance, terror, grief, struggling affection, and shame, were so mingled, that no one emotion was so legibly imprinted, as to be intelligible to the eye of the nicest observation. But when Cecilia, embarrassed by the penetrating look with which the marchesa regarded her, became even more confused, and ceased to speak, a sudden suspicion of the truth struck on the mind of her friend, and, after a little pause, she asked—

"Was this young Orazio handsome?"

A deeper blush suffused the cheeks of Cecilia, as, struggling to attain an appearance of composure, she hesitatingly replied—

"I don't know—I believe he was—that is, he seemed very amiable, and ——" And now this lovely girl, overpowered by

the effort she had made to conquer the innate ingenuousness of her heart, burst into tears; and, hiding her face with her trembling hands, wept in silence, thus leaving the marchesa in no doubt as to the nature of the sentiments with which the mysterious Orazio had inspired her artless bosom.

Deeply affected, this amiable woman now took the chilling hand of Cecilia in her own, and, without affecting to have discovered her secret, attempted to soothe her agitated spirits; and declaring that she would not permit her to continue a conversation so evidently distressing to her, endeavoured to abstract the thoughts of Cecilia from the subject of her present uneasiness, by speaking of several circumstances indifferent in themselves, indeed, but, as they related to the Marchese di Rovenza, and the family at the pallazo, were rather calculated to withdraw the attention of her young *protegée* from the torturing reflections which had seized her mind. Cecilia, soon recovering from her distress and embarrassment, so far conquered her feelings as to be able to listen, with an appearance of composure, to the marchesa, whose conversation revealed many traits of character in her lord, which could scarcely fail of being interesting to her young friend.

"The marchese," continued his lady with a deep sigh, "although in some points of his disposition as inexplicable to me, as to all who know him, is not defi-

cient in some qualities which should belong to his rank and situation. He diffuses his wealth with judicious liberality; but he is neither ostentatious nor extravagant: his temper is equal, but cold, and his usual habits those of taciturnity and reserve. Of you only has he spoken in more animated terms than ever I have heard him use, and his avowed conviction, that you are nobly descended, will, I trust, at length ensure to you that respect from Ottavania, which, I fear, she would not otherwise feel inclined to shew you."

"And wherefore is the marchese so well convinced that I have claims to nobility of rank, madam?" timidly enquired Cecilia.

"Your education, the description of your mother's manners, and the mystery which it is evident she used respecting her early life, together with the presumption that were she a person of no consequence, she could have no motive for such a line of conduct, nor be subjected to the malevolence of the powerful foe who has torn her from her home. These are circumstances which form a reasonable foundation for the marchese's opinion, that your family is really of exalted rank. But now we are on this subject, allow me to ask, did not the signora ever inform you of your real name?"

Cecilia hesitated. She remembered the recital her mother had commenced when she was interrupted by the arrival of the Signor Malvezzi; but she knew not whe-

ther she was at liberty to mention the reference her mother had then made to her family. At length, after a few moment's consideration, she said: "To you, marchesa, I believe I may confess that my mother once told me her family was noble and wealthy, and that she had once resided in Venice."

The marchesa now appeared rather agitated. "Are you acquainted with your real name, Cecilia?" she asked.

"No, madam."

"Well, then, for your own sake, it will be best never to mention to any other person what you have just related to me, as—as they might discredit it. Do not even acknowledge it to the marchese, lest your not being able to give him a full account of yourself, should injure you. Promise me that you will not; for be assured it may alter his favourable opinion of you."

Cecilia's own prudence accorded with this request, as she thought it not proper again to reveal a circumstance, which she felt inclined to imagine her mother might wish to be concealed.

"I do promise, madam," she said.

"But how came you not to speak of this incident to the marchese, at the time when he first so particularly questioned you on the subject of your mother's family?"

"Because the agitation of my spirits at that time rendered me, perhaps, unable to

comprehend the extent of his enquiries. I think, the marchese desired to know the name of my mother: I could not inform him; but I referred him to the Father Ascollini, who, as my mother's confessor, I imagined was acquainted with her history; and when it proved that he was unacquainted with her former circumstances, I feared to speak further on the subject."

"You did right. To have merely said that your family was noble, and had resided in Venice, could have furnished no information which could have led to the discovery of your mother's enemy; as it is evident, by the marchese and myself being unacquainted with his title, which is a German one, that he is a stranger in this country; and 'tis highly probable that your own family are not Italians."

Cecilia, now recollecting that she had heard her mother converse with some pilgrims in the German language, was almost inclined to believe that her mother was a native of Germany; but as she could not speak decidedly on this point, and did not think proper to intrude her surmises on the attention of the marchesa, she remained silent.

Meanwhile the Marchesa di Rovenza seemed occupied by some internal uneasiness; but at length she suddenly exclaimed: "And now, Cecilia, we will speak no more on your affairs: you have indulged me with some interesting accounts of your *happy* cottage, and I, in return,

will acquaint you with some of the secrets of my *unhappy* home." Sighing, and brushing away a tear, she continued: "The marchese and myself, you will soon perceive, are a perfectly polite couple: we married without love on either side, and are therefore content to dispense with the affectation of sentiments which we do not feel. In short, we are the most polite pair in Venice; but, alas! (her tone now varied to that of deep sorrow) the marchese's politeness is not inherited by his children, nor does he appear to think it necessary that such a qualification should be possessed by them. Both educated at a distance from me, they neither love nor revere me as they ought to do. Ottavania, indeed, does not even affect to treat me with respect, nor do I believe I shall ever possess her affection. But of Leonardo I have better hopes: his heart is not depraved, and he already begins to conduct himself towards me with that considerate attention, which leads me to indulge the soothing prospect of being blessed with the filial regard of one of my children; but ——"

Shocked beyond the power of language to express by the description the unhappy marchesa was giving, Cecilia uttered a deep, involuntary sigh.

The marchesa started, and paused. She had been leaning on the arm of the couch —her eyes fixed mournfully on the floor as she conversed; but now she raised them

on Cecilia; and, reading in the pale but expressive countenance of the lovely girl all the horror her commencing detail had excited, burst into tears, exclaiming—

"Ah! my young friend, you despise me! You ask, how can this miserable mother be an object of indifference to her children, unless her own misconduct has deprived her of their affections?—But this is not the case."

Cecilia's distress was now increased; she solemnly protested that her involuntary sigh was occasioned by her astonishment and sorrow at finding that a mother so amiable could be thus neglected.

"Alas!" said the marchesa, "it is but lately that my unfortunate and mistaken children have resided at the pallazo. The marchese, indulging an erroneous idea that were he to have suffered them to have imbibed sentiments of affection for their mother, they might prove less conformable to his will than he wished them to be, removed them at an infant age from my arms, and confided them to the care of strangers, instructed to train them to respect him only, and to consider him as the future ruler of their destinies, which, they were taught, would be splendid or miserable, in proportion as they should yield implicit obedience to his will. In vain have I remonstrated on the folly of a plan which was so evidently calculated to render these devoted beings equally unamiable and miserable. The marchese has constantly replied: "If

they are taught obedience to both parents, they will never know which to obey; and as I do not choose to run the hazard of encountering any opposition to the plans which I may form for their establishment, they shall early be convinced that it is to me alone they must look for every thing.' In vain I represented that their affection for their mother could not interfere with his views: Rovenza was obstinate in his intentions, and I am doomed to behold my unfortunate children the victims of his strange caprice. Ottavania, in the convent in which she has been educated, has had all her evil propensities fostered: she seems to have been told, that pride is dignity; ambition, greatness of mind; and overweening insolence, and sullen haughtiness of manners, the characteristic marks of noble birth.—But what am I saying?" exclaimed the marchesa. Then suddenly rising, she paced the room in an agony of grief, faintly articulating: "Oh, wretched mother! that thou should'st live to record the vices of thy child"

After a few moments she became rather calm; and again seating herself on the sofa beside Cecilia, who, trembling and horror-stricken, had not power to attempt consoling her, she said—

"Cecilia di Berlotti, a model of filial piety herself, shrinks in dismay from the knowledge of the crimes of others; and, no doubt, wonders that a mother's tongue can condemn, or reveal the errors of her

child. Alas! had there been a possibility of concealing my misfortunes, I had not even revealed them unto you; but you will behold sad proofs of my misery, and it was only to spare you the shock which I feel you will receive, that I have thus agonized my heart by attempting to account for, and prepare you for scenes which you may not avoid witnessing here."

Cecilia now entreated that the marchesa would not give herself any further uneasiness by entering into painful explanations on subjects of which, as a stranger, she could not presume to form a judgment. "But," added the amiable girl, "I must indulge the hope that time may ameliorate these distressing circumstances; for as the signor and signora become better acquainted with the amiable qualities of their too much neglected parent, they will be sensible of their impiety and injustice; and the conviction that they are wrong will speedily induce them to make some atonement."

"Lovely angelic girl!" now exclaimed a voice near the door, and in the next moment Leonardo stood before the astonished Cecilia, who, rising in affright, would have retreated, but he passionately caught her hand; and, throwing himself at the feet of his mother, exclaimed---

"Entreat, I beseech you, madam, this angel to remain and witness my contrition and my vows.—I have for some time been a concealed listener to your discourse. Let

the sincerity with which I make this confession plead my excuse for such a meanness, and believe me, madam, when I declare that my heart has been pierced by the knowledge of your sufferings, and that henceforth I can never cease to regard you with that love and veneration which you so justly merit from an unworthy son, who has too long been a stranger to your inestimable qualities."

Agitated, trembling, doubting, and almost afraid to yield to the impulses of her heart, the marchesa gazed on the animated countenance of her son, who, still kneeling at her feet, implored that forgiveness, which the sincerity that beamed from his eyes declared he merited. Bending over him, this affectionate mother received his filial embrace, and as she tremulously whispered a benediction, the first tears of maternal love fell on his glowing cheek.

A silent, but agitated witness of this unexpected scene, Cecilia, while tears of sympathy and delight hung glittering on her silken eye-lashes, stood regarding the reconciliation of these near relatives, and looked, indeed, the angel of peace; till Leonardo, starting up, bowed to his mother and herself, and then hastily withdrew, evidently to conceal emotions so new and pleasing to his heart.

The marchesa followed his receding form, with eyes beaming all of affection and hope; then said—

"Rejoice with me my amiable, my in-

estimable young friend—rejoice with me on the restoration of my son. I may now hope that my declining days may be blessed with those tender attentions which filial love bestows on drooping age."

Cecilia did, indeed, rejoice with the marchesa; and, inexperienced as she was, augured the most favourable result from the delicacy with which Leonardo had withdrawn to avoid a further display of his feelings. A summons to supper, however, prevented any further observation on this pleasing event; and the servant, who came to say that supper waited, informed the marchesa that the marchese and the Lady Ottavania would pass the night at the villa of the friend whom they went to visit.

The marchesa and Cecilia then descended to the supper-room, at the door of which they were met by Leonardo, whose features still exhibited traces of agitation; but he led his mother to the head of the table with an air of unostentatious tenderness, and his manners at once easy and respectfully attentive, evinced that his reform was not likely to prove mere momentary enthusiasm. Towards Cecilia his deportment was perfectly polite, and if his eyes too frequently expressed the admiration he felt for her, she was not embarrassed by looks, which he took care should not meet her observation.

On the marchesa's enquiry what had occasioned his not accompanying his father

and Ottavania to the villa di Rossi, he replied, that while he had returned into the pallazo to offer his sister's apologies for the offence she had given the young Signora di Berlotti, the marchese had ordered the gondola to put off without him, after directing a servant to inform him that he would excuse his attendance at the villa di Rossi that evening, and that both himself and Ottavania would pass a week there. "I was rather discomposed by the abrupt determination of the marchese," added Leonardo, "and did not therefore return immediately into the pallazo."

The marchesa now easily comprehended that her lord had been displeased with his son's warm interference respecting the affront offered to Cecilia by Ottavania, and had, doubtless, at the instigation of the latter, declined Leonardo's accompanying them, a circumstance by no means unlikely, as his daughter was peculiarly his favorite. Fortunately this idea did not occur to Cecilia; who, prepared for the caprices of the family, did not attribute the conduct of the marchese in dismissing his son, to any other cause than the mere whim of the moment. As soon as supper was ended, and Cecilia could with propriety arise, she requested the marchesa's permission to retire, pleading, in excuse for this request, fatigue and indisposition.

The marchesa, instantly reproaching herself for having so long detained her fair *protegée* from that repose which she

so much required, gave orders that the Signora di Berlotti should be attended to her room; and Cecilia, after giving and receiving mutual wishes of good repose, withdrew, followed by the ardent glances of Leonardo, who attended her to the vestibule, and then returned to the marchesa, with whom he sat conversing till a late hour; evincing both by his looks and the ingenuous confession of the faults to which he was most inclined—the sincerity of his intentions to forsake those habits and prejudices, which his reason could not fail to condemn; and his earnest wish of henceforward regarding the marchesa as the guardian who should guide his actions; and, by her sacred admonitions, rescue him from the influence of the passions.

Leonardo di Rovenza was, indeed, unfeignedly sincere in his professions; but it is but too probable, that had he not been seized with the most ardent and unbounded admiration of the young Cecilia di Berlotti, he would not so soon have perceived the criminality of the opinions in which he had been educated, nor judged an immediate reform necessary.

When his anger at his father's departing without him had subsided, he began to rejoice in the opportunity, then so unexpectedly afforded him, of passing the evening in the society of his mother and her lovely *protegée;* but when he returned to the saloon where he had left them, he

was informed that the marchesa had retired with the young lady to her private apartments; and unwilling to intrude himself into a retirement which he had never yet visited, he anxiously waited the re-appearance of his mother and Cecilia; but their lengthened absence being more than he had patience to support, he proceeded to the marchesa's dressing-room, where he, on enquiry, had been informed she then was, and from a door which opened on the principal corridor, he overheard most of the conversation which the marchesa held respecting the unhappiness which her children's want of duty and affection caused her. He had not long listened ere he felt the strongest emotions of mingled shame, remorse, and affection rise in his bosom, together with admiration for the character of Cecilia, in whom he now found filial piety was a predominant virtue. These contending feelings were soon succeeded by the generous enthusiasm, which, rendering him incapable of attending to the suggestions of false pride or shame, impelled him to throw himself at the feet of his injured parent, and vow to pursue that conduct which he now felt could alone secure him the esteem of Cecilia.

This was the first action of Leonardo's life that had been crowned with the sweet reward which the consciousness of having performed a sacred duty confers; and when he retired to his chamber, his reflexions

were the most pleasing he had ever experienced. He already felt that he had risen in the estimation of the young stranger, and that he had, in the marchesa, his mother, secured to himself an affectionate friend, whose virtues now appeared to him in their proper light. As to the mysterious circumstances of Cecilia, they affected him not: she was exquisitely beautiful, accomplished, probably nobly-born, and, under the protection of the marchesa; and, as he promised himself a thousand opportunities of inspiring her with sentiments similar to those which filled his own bosom, he lulled all rising doubts and fears by the flattering hope which whispered him not to despair.

CHAP. XXIII.

Nearly a week elapsed ere the return of the marchese and his daughter, during which time Leonardo uninterruptedly enjoyed the fascinating society of Cecilia, and added his unwearied efforts to those of his amiable mother, to sooth and console the suspensive sorrow with which the incertitude and alarm that she suffered respecting the situation of her mother oppressed the mind of this lovely girl.

The arrival of the marchese and Ottavania at length put a period to these comparatively peaceful hours. It is true, Rovenza still addressed his young guest with

marked attention; but his daughter varied not from the cold haughtiness usual in her manner. On the evening after their return, however, a circumstance occurred which relieved the grief of Cecilia, and rendered her more sensible of the kind consideration that she received from her new protectress. On retiring to her chamber for the night, she had found Lodelli, as usual, in waiting; and while listening to the loquacious prattle of her attendant, she glanced her eyes on a sealed packet, which she accidentally perceived on the dressing table. Hastily examining the direction, she saw, with surprise extreme, that it was addressed to herself. An exclamation of astonishment fell from her lips, and, suddenly turning to Lodelli, she demanded from whom the packet had been received.

Lodelli stared, and said she had never seen it before. Cecilia then directed her to inquire among the servants of the palazo.

"Dear signora, had'nt you better see or read what is in it first," said Lodelli; and Cecilia tore open the envelope. It contained two letters. She opened that which was uppermost, but had nearly fainted on reading these words:—

"Angelo Guicciardini informs Cecilia di Berlotti, that the signora, her mother, is now in perfect safety. The continuance of that safety may depend on her daughter's preserving the strictest silence on this

point. Lest the word of the robber Angelo should not be sufficient to convince Cecilia of her mother's welfare, a letter from the signora herself is inclosed."

Trembling, faltering, her breath almost suspended by the wild and joyful eagerness of her feelings, Cecilia now snatched up the second letter. It was indeed the hand-writing of her beloved mother. The first lines were expressive only of the feelings of the writer: they were words of fondness, of rapture and maternal anxiety; the paper was blotted seemingly with tears. Cecilia, as she endeavoured to read, almost blinded her sight. "Ever-loved, ever-duteous, adored child, fain would I express to thee, my exulting heart's best treasure, the joy I feel in being permitted to address and assure you of my safety; but my happiness renders me nearly incoherent. I wish to tell my Cecilia that I have endured no sufferings but those horrible mental agonies with which my dread for her safety oppresses me. I desire to explain to her those circumstances of my past life which would develop to her the cause of our present separation and distresses; but this is not a time for explanation. Feeling that the assurance of my perfect safety will sufficiently calm the unhappiness which my Cecilia must have endured, I will confine myself to telling her, that I have been rescued from the power of

my inveterate foe, whose wounds, even if they should not prove mortal, will for some time deprive him of the power of personally exerting himself to discover my retreat. My preserver was the mysterious Orazio Angelo."

The letter dropped from the hand of Cecilia, and a moment elapsed ere she had power to proceed in the perusal.

"To the intrepid valour of that young man Cecilia owes perhaps the life of her mother, and also that of my faithful Guispardo."

Again Cecilia paused, and, with streaming eyes upraised to heaven, implored a blessing on Orazio, while a thrilling emotion of love and tenderness rushed on her heart. Once more her eager looks were rivetted on the letter. "But not only am I indebted to Orazio as my deliverer: two days after he had placed me and my servant in a secure and sequestered retreat, he brought me information of thy safety, my child. You are under the protection of the Rovenza family. Well, they know you not; and you must remain with them till circumstances will allow us to meet again. The marchesa is a proper protectress for my Cecilia; but she must not be informed, as yet at least, that you have heard from me. Be not alarmed by the idea that the friendly exertions of the Rovenza family to discover my situation may lead to any discovery of my retreat. It is impossible. Console yourself, my beloved,

my affectionate child, with the knowledge of my being in security, and suffer not the impracticability of our meeting for a time to depress your spirits. If I hear that my Cecilia endures with cheerfulness and resignation our unavoidable separation, I shall then be enabled to support an absence which would otherwise be more intolerable than I can express. An opportunity may occur of your being able to write to me. Avail yourself of it. I think it necessary to tell you to do so, because I fear that your timidity might lead you to conclude that by trusting any person, you may injure me; but a proper agent will watch to receive your letter."

The signora concluded her epistle with repeated expressions indicative of the affection she bore her lovely child, but never once mentioned the name of, or alluded to, the robber Angelo. For some moments after reading this letter, Cecilia stood motionless, absorbed in wonder and joy, till the voice of Lodelli recalled her from her reverie.

"Ah, my dear young mistress," said the kind-hearted servant, "no wonder the thoughts of my dear lady's safety should make you be overcome with joy."

Cecilia started in dismay: she had been solemnly warned to hold the strictest silence on the subject, and she was terrified and amazed that even Lodelli should be so well informed.

"How do you know so, Lodelli?" she tremulously inquired.

"Because you cried out, 'Oh, heaven, accept my gratitude for my mother's preservation,'" replied Lodelli, thus informing Cecilia that she had herself inadvertently disclosed the secret. "But surely, signora," added she, "it cannot be any harm for me to know this?"

Cecilia, now recollecting the tried fidelity of this servant, no longer hesitated to confess that her mother was indeed in safety, but declined telling any other particulars to Lodelli, who, delighted with even this share of information, soon evinced that her gratitude and affection were far more predominant than her curiosity, as she made no more inquiries on the subject, and promised to keep the secret most sacredly. But the good-natured young woman could not forbear expressing so much pleasure at the thought of seeing her dear lady soon, that Cecilia was compelled to further inform her, that some time would probably elapse ere they should meet, telling her at the same time that this circumstance was a proof how essential secrecy would be to the safety of her mother.

Lodelli again promised to be careful and silent, and Cecilia soon dismissed her for the night.

Sleep visited not the eye-lids of Cecilia for many hours. A thousand mingled feelings kept her awake; and although joy for

her mother's safety was most predominant in her mind, yet the singularity of her having received the letter which contained the pleasing assurance of this fact, enclosed with one from the robber Angelo Guicciardini, formed an interesting subject for her reflections.

The signora had mentioned Orazio Angelo as her deliverer. She had not once alluded to Angelo Guicciardini; and now Cecilia found herself involved in a train of perplexing surmises: but after some consideration, she mentally condemned herself for indulging in useless conjectures on the subject, till suddenly recollecting that the hand-writing of the robber's billet did not appear to be the same with that she had formerly received from him, she instantly conceived the idea that the latter, bearing Angelo's name, might have been written by Orazio himself, who, knowing that the robber had promised her his protection, had delicately availed himself of this method of attempting to conceal the service he had rendered her mother, lest she might attribute any detail he might have given to an inclination of boasting of his exploits.

Romantic and improbable as was this conjecture, Cecilia eagerly cherished it; and as soon as the morning light dawned on the towers of Venice, she arose, and carefully searching her trunk for the casket given her by the pilgrim, and which Lo-

delli had informed her was carefully packed up there, at length found it, and, with trembling haste, taking out the first billet of Angelo Guicciardini, perceived, to her infinite joy, that the hand-writing was dissimilar to that which was enclosed with the letter of her mother.

The mind of Cecilia being impressed by this circumstance with an almost instant conviction that there could be no existing connexion between Orazio and the robber Angelo, she yielded herself up to the strong emotions of her heart, and suffered her thoughts to dwell on the young preserver of her mother with sentiments of the tenderest gratitude, wholly unconscious that she was cherishing an affection which future events might forbid her to indulge.

Intending to procure implements to write to her mother as soon as possible, Cecilia most impatiently wished for the appearance of Lodelli, who did not, however, come to the room of her young mistress as early as usual. In excuse for this delay, she informed Cecilia that Berina and several of the servants had kept her up till almost morning, telling her many stories relative to the family of their lord, and asking her as many questions in return.

"But I was too cunning for them, I promise you, signora; and so they learnt nothing from me; but I had the luck to find out something that will surprise you as

much as it did me, signora. May I tell it to you?"

"Certainly, if it is of importance for me to know," replied Cecilia.

"Well then, signora, you know I told you that I suspected that the Signor Fabricio was one of the ruffians that helped to carry off my lady and Guispardo; and now it turns out to be nothing at all but my mistake."

"I am already convinced of this, you may recollect, Lodelli," observed Cecilia, "from the improbability of the marchese's employing a servant who attends on his own person on such an enterprise."

"Why, that might have come into my head too, signora, if I had not been half stupid with fright; but I was not quite so much to blame as you may think, my dear young lady; for Fabricio has a brother, who, he says, is the very model of himself; and this brother has been missing many years; and so poor Fabricio was lamenting, last night, that he was afraid his brother had got into some bad ways: and who knows, signora, but that may have been the case? The more I think of it, the more I suspect that Fabricio's brother must have been the man that was going to choke poor Guispardo."

"Why so, Lodelli?"

"Why, because the man has been missing so long, and has, no doubt, become one of the terrible robber Angelo's men,"

returned Lodelli. " And this is not at all unlikely, signora; for if such a fine, elegant, sensible, young cavalier as the Signor Orazio could be persuaded to be one of Angelo's robbers, no wonder that Fabricio's brother should."

" And who has asserted that he is so?" demanded Cecilia, while the pale hue which overspread her cheek evinced the horror which the supposition excited.

" Nobody says that he is so, signora; for Fabricio only declares that he don't know what is become of him."

" Of whom?"

" Why, of Giovani, Fabricio's brother, signora."

" But I——I——meant to say—How do you know that the Signor Orazio is one of Angelo's men?"

" O dear, Signora! every body must know that. All the servants of the palazo don't scruple to say so."

" And how are they acquainted with any thing relative to this young man?" enquired Cecilia, in almost breathless agitation.

Lodelli coloured, and hesitated: a frightful suspicion stole on the mind of Cecilia, and she eagerly said: " Is it to your imprudence, Lodelli, that the household of the marchese owe their knowledge of the Signor Orazio." Her look of serious displeasure confounded Lodelli; her colour heightened, and she began to sob.

Cecilia sunk into a chair, faintly ex-

claiming—"Oh, my mother! what may be thy fate, when it rests on the discretion of such a being!"

"Oh! my dear young lady," cried Lodelli, while tears ran down her face—"Oh! pray do not look so sadly, nor say such cruel words. St. Anthony forbid that I should have been so wicked as to have told any thing about my dear lady, the signora! No, if I was to die, I wouldn't tell that; and if I did say any thing about the Signor Orazio, it was only that Father Ascollini suspected him to be a great, young robber; and I did not know it could be any harm to say what that holy man said. But I did the young signor justice too; for I told how handsome and elegant he was, and that he was, besides, so learned, and played upon the flute so beautifully; and how he seemed to adore the very ground you walked upon; and they said it was a shame for him to pretend he was so fond of you, when no doubt he was only plotting how he could find out the best opportunity for that terrible Angelo Guicciardini to carry off your mother. But I told them, that whether or no he was in the plot, it was no pretence his being fond of you; for I have heard him sigh so, and speak your name so softly, when he has been walking all alone by moonlight in the lemon-grove; and——"

During this curious speech, Cecilia, overwhelmed by confusion, had sat motionless, and incapable of stopping the vo

lubility of her attendant's tongue; but when Lodelli spoke of Orazio's passion for herself, her agitation became so excessive, that her looks were sufficient indications of the displeasure and confusion she felt; and Lodelli, self-interrupted, stopped suddenly, and retreated a few paces, abashed and dismayed at the glance of reproof she received.

After a little pause, Cecilia arose, and walking towards the window, waved her hand for Lodelli to withdraw. But this faithful and affectionate being, whose only foible was her extreme loquacity, hesitated to obey, and bursting into tears, stood weeping bitterly.

After a moment's reflection, Cecilia, indulging the gentle feelings of her heart, and remembering affectionately the long attachment of this young woman, who was but a few years older than herself, and had grown up with her, took the hand of Lodelli, and mildly but seriously said—

"I am grieved to be compelled to condemn any action of your's, Lodelli; but I must tell you, that if you do not set the strictest guard on your words, your indiscretion may be the utter ruin of my dear mother and myself."

The trembling Lodelli now looked the very image of horror.

"Me, signora! me ruin my own dear good mistresses!——"

"Do not interrupt me, Lodelli: I well know that you would not intentionally in-

jure us; but if you wish to avoid the terrible probability of doing so, you will henceforth resolutely determine never to speak of our concerns to any person whatever. And I also desire that you will most carefully observe never to make the Signor Orazio the subject of discourse. I am now about to give you the most convincing proof that I believe, after this warning, I may depend on your prudence. You already know that my mother is in safety; and now I inform you that the Signor Orazio was the person who rescued her from the power of the ruffians who had carried her off, and who has conducted her to the secure place of concealment where she now remains."

To describe the surprise and shame depicted in the features of Lodelli, would be impossible.

"You may now perceive," continued Cecilia, "of how much falsehood and injustice you have been guilty. But this must ever be the case with those who indulge the foolish propensity to talking incessantly, which, I am grieved to say, distinguishes you."

"Oh, signora! if ever I speak of any thing again, I only hope that I may be punished for it as I am now," exclaimed Lodelli, weeping violently. "But pray, signora, do pardon me this once; and if ever they coax and cajole me into telling them any thing again, I'm sure I shall deserve twenty such looks like that one which

you gave me just now—it almost broke my heart—it was so sad and mournful, and seemed to accuse me of such terrible things. But do you forgive me, signora?"

Cecilia assured her that she did; and then most particularly cautioned her not to mention what she had been told relative to the Signor Orazio's having been the deliverer of her mother.

Lodelli most earnestly promised to preserve the secret entrusted to her keeping.

"And I'm sure, signora," she added, "I shall do a pretty hard penance for having spoken so falsely of that dear, good young signor, who saved my lady from those villains; but I won't even tell my confessor his name."

Cecilia now directed Lodelli to procure her pens, ink, and paper, being determined to conceal her real motive for requesting to have writing materials by addressing a letter to the Father Ascollini, and sending it by the post.

The servant withdrew to execute the commands of her lady; and Cecilia sat down to reflect on the best means she could adopt for watching for the opportunity, which her mother had informed her might occur, for her letter to be conveyed to that dear parent.

The hurry of her thoughts had hitherto prevented Cecilia from considering how the packet she had found on the table could have been placed there; and it now occurred to her that some one servant of the

pallazo must have been employed on the occasion. But this was a circumstance which could not be ascertained without running the hazard of discovering the secret to some one who was, perhaps, unacquainted with the affair; besides, she could not enter into discourse with any one of the marchese's domestics; and the idea of setting Lodelli to make any attempt of the kind, she shrunk from with feelings of apprehension and distress, lest the unguarded simplicity of this young woman should betray her into some new indiscretion.

To await with patient watchfulness the opportunity which might occur of forwarding her letter to the signora, seemed the only safe method which Cecilia could pursue; and this she was at length compelled to determine on adopting.

The re-appearance of Lodelli put an end to her reflections.

"I cannot as yet, signora, get the things you sent me for; but Signor Caltonni, the major-domo, says, you shall have them very shortly. Since my lord the marchese, and the Signora Ottavania came home, all the people in the pallazo are in a bustle. Several fine ladies and noble gentlemen are now come to the pallazo, and I hear that they and the family are all to go to a beautiful villa of the marchese's to-morrow, or next day. I wonder whether we shall go too, signora?"

Cecilia heard this intelligence with ex-

treme anxiety, as, should she be included in the sudden removal, such a circumstance might entirely deprive her of the hoped for opportunity of writing to her mother. But before she could make any enquiries of Lodelli, a female attendant of the marchesa's came to know whether the young signora would choose breakfast in her own apartment, as the marchesa was engaged with the company newly arrived.

Cecilia, who considered this message as an intimation to her to remain in her own room, immediately availed herself of so pleasing a permission, and said she should prefer breakfasting in her apartment.

The girl withdrew, and in a few minutes her wishes were obeyed.

When she had concluded this meal, and was once more alone, she paced the room in all that anxiety and uneasiness which her situation naturally created in her mind. At length the return of Lodelli with the pens, ink, and paper, relieved her lady from some portion of the unhappiness she had been suffering. But as she was afraid to begin to write to her mother, lest some unexpected interruption should oblige her to leave her letter open to observation, she now sat down with the intention of addressing the Father Ascollini. This was, however, a task peculiarly distressing to the delicate and ingenuous mind of Cecilia. In her letter to the father she must make the most anxious enquiries respecting her mother, of whose present situation she

must thus affect ignorance; and she felt she must exert a degree of duplicity in so doing, very uncongenial to her nature. From the execution of this unpleasant office she was, however, prevented, by receiving a summons to attend the Marchese di Rovenza, who, she was informed, was waiting to see her in his library.

Involuntarily agitated by conjecture as to the marchese's motive for this interview, Cecilia desired the servant to conduct her to the library; and, leaving Lodelli in her apartment, she followed the domestic down the principal staircase, and through several marble arcades to the library, where the marchese was impatiently awaiting her appearance.

When the folding-doors of this splendid study were closed, and she found herself alone with the marchese, the perturbation of Cecilia increased; for she read in his countenance traces of extreme vexation and uneasiness. His behaviour was, however, very polite. He led her to a sofa, enquired whether her apartment was agreeable to her, and hoped that she would feel herself as happy as her situation would permit, while under his roof.

Cecilia replied by several polite acknowledgments. A short pause ensued; after which the marchese said:—

"I have requested this interview, Signora di Berlotti, not only to make those essential enquiries respecting your former situation, of which I must learn some fur-

ther particulars than those I am already acquainted with, ere I can hope to discover aught of the signora your mother's present circumstances; but I have also wished to see you for the purpose of asking you another question, which I implore you, for your own sake, to answer with sincerity."

The manner in which the marchese spoke, so severe, together with the eager and penetrating earnestness of his looks, would have given Cecilia considerable alarm, had not her surprise exceeded her other feelings She regarded him for a moment with a glance of astonishment and enquiry; but quickly recollecting herself, she averred her readiness to reply with sincerity to the question he meant to propose.

The marchese looked more severely on her, and said:—

"Did you not last night, after all my household were supposed to have retired to their respective chambers for the night, admit a stranger into your apartment."

Cecilia started back For a moment the shock her feelings received from such an accusation deprived her of the power of replying; but her confusion was soon succeeded by just indignation, and, rising with an air of calm dignity, she said, "If the Marchese di Roveuza believes me capable of such an act, he should also consider that he degrades himself by holding converse with one whom he could suspect of so daring an insult to his protection."

She was now leaving the room; but the marchese hastily seized her hand.

"Hear me, signora," he cried. "This impetuous anger may proceed from wounded delicacy and conscious innocence: I may allow for the excess of your feelings on this occasion; but remember, I merely *asked* you whether you had admitted a stranger to your room. I did not *accuse* you of having done so."

"Then in reply to your enquiry, my lord marchese, I solemnly assure you that I did not. I neither beheld, nor conversed with any human being at the hour you mention last night," returned Cecilia.

The marchese bent his eyes to the floor, and stood deliberating At length he raised his head, and looking on Cecilia with complacency, he said, "I believe you: I believe that Cecilia di Berlotti is incapable of such an act: but I must now intreat your pardon, and, in justice to your feelings, account to you for the singular enquiry I have made. This morning Caltorini, with looks full of importance and dismay, requested to speak to me alone. As soon as I could quit the company, I met him here, when he gave me the following relation. He had been sitting up later than usual, arranging some papers that I had directed him to prepare for my inspection; but having occasion for some records which he had forgotten to take with him to his room, and which were still in the library, he was under the necessity

of coming hither for them. On his way from his room, he was obliged to pass from the opposite arcade into that which leads to this apartment. In crossing the vestibule, however, he fancied he heard a footstep echoing heavily in the corridor on which your chamber opens; and looking up, he perceived the figure of a man beginning to descend the marble stairs. Caltorini, who is subject to superstitious fears, imagined this intruder to be a supernatural visitant; and his terror depriving him of the power of moving, or of alarming the family by his cries, he stood trembling, with his eyes fixed on the figure, who, with audacious deliberation, descended the stairs, and scarcely looking at the dastard, who was gazing at him with such cowardly fear, crossed the vestibule, and escaped; or *vanished*, as Caltorini swears, among the marble pillars which support the corridor."

While the marchese spoke, a suspicion of this figure's being the secret agent who had placed the packet in her room, came into the mind of Cecilia; and while the idea that it might have been Orazio threw her into a state of increased agitation, she asked how Caltorini had described the figure he had seen.

The marchese cast on her a look of earnest scrutiny as she made this enquiry; and Cecilia, conscious of his motive for hazarding it, and now half excusing his recent suspicions that the stranger had in-

truded into the pallazo on her account, blushed deeply, while her eyes fell beneath the steady glance with which the marchese regarded her.

After a slight pause, however, he said: "I scarcely know how to reply to your enquiry; for I cannot perfectly rely on the accuracy of the description given me of this midnight hero by that silly Caltorini, whose fear, I believe, had almost deprived him of his senses at the moment. The description is, however, quite consistent with my cowardly major-domo's idea of the supernatural appearance of this singular visitant. In short, I have been informed that the man was dressed in a long black garment that almost concealed his figure, which is very tall: his folded arms confined his habit on his bosom; and on his head he wore a black helmet, overshadowed by a large plume of waving scarlet feathers; and to complete the whole, his eyes, which Caltorini swears seemed fixed, looked hollow and ghastly, and his face as white as snow. This you will perceive, young lady, is a description such as I might expect a frightened fool would give, in excuse for letting the fellow escape; but notwithstanding the nodding plumes, pale face, and hollow eyes, I feel convinced that this terrific apparition is a mere mortal sprite; and should I hear of another visit of this nature, he may find he shall not again escape with impunity."

The marchese spoke with bitterness; but the natural hesitation of his manner was now more apparent than ever. "You do not make any observation on this affair, signora," he added, after having paused a moment to give Cecilia an opportunity of replying, who now said, "It is impossible for me to make any remark on the subject, my lord, as it is one on which I cannot form any decided opinion. Permit me, however, to say that I regret that such a circumstance should have led you to suspect that this clandestine visitor entered the pallazo with my knowledge or approbation."

"He certainly did not venture to do so without some important motive," said the marchese: "and as last night was the first time of his being seen here, you will pardon the error I committed in placing his visit to your account, especially when you reflect that none of my domestics are of consequence enough for any person to run such a hazard on theirs. But as you profess an entire ignorance of this affair, signora, we will dismiss the subject, and proceed to one which is at present more important. You informed me, I think, that you are a stranger to the private history of your mother. Am I correct?"

"Perfectly so, my lord."

"It is very extraordinary that the signora should never confide her real name even to her daughter!" observed, the marchese, musingly. "Did she never speak of her

country, her friends, nor of any circumstances which might have occurred in her family."

"Never, signor marchese," replied Cecilia, who now began to tremble lest the marchese's enquiries should compel her to use some evasion or other most contrary to her principles; for his looks betrayed so much inquisitorial scrutiny, that they prepared her for the most minute investigation.

After a few moments passed in mutual silence, the marchese said, "But certainly you are not uninformed as to the Signor Malvezzi, the stranger, who at stated periods was accustomed to visit the signora: pray, who is he?"

"It is not in my power to reply even to this question as you desire, my lord; for I am really unacquainted with every thing which relates to the Signor Malvezzi, never having been permitted to intrude on his interviews with my mother, and therefore of course am uninformed as to his motives for his visits."

The marchese looked excessively chagrined. Another pause ensued. At length he said:—

"I regret that the singular diffidence of your mother to entrust to your prudence a knowledge of her private concerns should have tended to produce so unlucky a result as seems likely to occur; for it will, I fear, be utterly out of my power to make any attempts to free her from the dreadful cir-

cumstances in which she may be at present involved, unless I could obtain some information relative to the early part of her life. You will perceive, signora," he added, regarding Cecilia with a look of keen penetration, as if endeavouring to read her inmost thoughts, "how impossible it is, under the present nature of the affair, for me to interpose; for I have nothing to direct my researches after the Count de Weilburgh, as I cannot even discover to what country he belongs. Could I have even ascertained the country of your mother, something might have been done; for I am confident that a woman of her rank could not suddenly have disappeared from her family and connexions, without such an event having been much remarked; and the discovery of her name or titles might perhaps have led to that of her foes."

Again the marchese paused; but Cecilia sat silent and embarrassed, and he soon proceeded:—

"Your silence, young lady, seems to assure me that you cannot assist me with any requisite information. I can regret this only for your own sake. All I can do I——phsaw! what can I do?" he added, rising, and walking about the room with an air of vexation. Cecilia also arose, intending to withdraw. She was beginning to thank him for the concern he expressed on her mother's and her own account, when the marchese cried—"Hold, Signora

Cecilia; I cannot listen to an acknowledgment of obligations which do not exist. My desire to serve you, I find, exceeds my power, and is rather checked by the involuntary suspicion that you affect a reserve towards me which gives me no very flattering opinion of the confidence I hoped you would repose in me. It is true, you may not have been enabled to reply to many of the enquiries I have just made; but I have not failed to remark that you are evidently averse to speaking on the subject; and you must certainly have some concealed motive for a conduct which displays so little concern and anxiety respecting the situation of your parent."

Cecilia now felt indiscribably shocked and agitated. Artless and ingenuous, she had not been able to affect the anxious uneasiness which, had she not been secretly informed that her mother was in safety, she certainly would have suffered in a very great degree; but as she had not dared to confess this important secret, she was doomed to submit in silence to an imputation most distressing to her feelings.

The marchese watched with eager attention the varying colour heighten and fade on her expressive countenance. His discrimination soon enabled him to perceive that severe accusation was not the method by which he could obtain her confidence, if indeed she had any thing to confide, and, in a gentler tone than he had hitherto used, he said:—

"Forgive, signora, the accusation of evasion which my recent words contained; but remember that my scrutiny on this subject can proceed only from my earnest desire to rescue the Signora di Berlotti from the dreadful fate which may attend her continuing much longer in the power of her enemies. In justification of my hasty expressions, permit me to urge that your silence induced me to suspect that you feared to entrust me with the few circumstances which are known to you respecting your——your——your—— Pray, who was the young man that—that Orazio Angelo, whom the Signora di Berlotti so mysteriously adopted?"

The confused transition which the marchese had made in his speech increased the embarrassment of Cecilia, and added to the force of the agitation she suffered. She had not power to reply immediately; and the marchese had again demanded some account of Orazio, ere she was able to assure him that she could not even give him any satisfactory information on that subject.

"How strange! how singular!" exclaimed the marchese. "I cannot possibly conceive why you should have been kept in such utter ignorance of every circumstance that could elucidate the mystery which, I fear, the impossibility of at present developing may ultimately prove the destruction of the signora. I suppose, however, that you *can* let me know something relative to the caverns with which

the cottage communicates. Had the close vicinity of those dreary vaults been known to the signora from her first entering her humble residence?"

More and more distressed and confused, Cecilia now replied:—

"Humiliated as I may be in the opinion of the Marchese di Rovenza by the declaration I am about to make, I must nevertheless confess that I know nothing relative to my mother's early knowledge of those caverns; and two years only are past since I first learnt they were connected with our dwelling, and then it was by accident only. I made some enquiries respecting those deep recesses of the earth, and was once permitted, under the guidance of our domestics, to explore a few of the passages leading to them; but except that some travellers had been murdered at the mouth of the cave, some years back, I never heard any thing particular."

"How many years did you say?" cried the marchese, hastily.

"I did not mention the exact space of time from that sad event," returned Cecilia; "for I was never informed of it."

"Never informed!" repeated the marchese, in a tone of querulous peevishness—"You are not informed on any point which is interesting. Where is the mouth of the cave situated, signora?"

"About two miles from the cottage, my lord," answered Cecilia, rather hurt and surprised at the singularity of the mar-

chese's looks and manner; which, however, quickly varied from impatient anxiety to the fixed stare of gloomy meditation. His silence continued so long, that Cecilia at length once more arose.

"Whither are you hastening, signora?" exclaimed the marchese, recalled from his abstraction, and rising also. "But, pardon me; I will not detain you longer: yet ere you go, suffer me to hazard one more enquiry. Did the signora, your mother, ever reside in Venice?"

Thus abruptly questioned on a subject on which she had been enjoined to silence even by the marchesa, Cecilia experienced the utmost emotions of embarrassment; yet she hesitated not to reply that some particular circumstances prevented her from answering his enquiry with the sincerity she wished to do, and must therefore request permission to be silent.

The marchese gave her a glance of haughty anger, while he said—"Your silence is equivalent to a confession that the signora has resided in Venice, I am now convinced; and were I to indulge the present impulses of my feelings, I might be inclined to inform you that I should appreciate your want of confidence in me, as it merits. However, if you think proper, you are at liberty to retire, signora; and let me request you to accept my assurances that, while you are under my protection, you will receive every attention which your rank demands."

Cold respect and scrutinizing observation now marked the air and looks of the marchese; and Cecilia, availing herself of this permission to retire, curtsied her acknowledgments, and withdrew from an interview which had only added to her troubles new fears and new anxieties.

CHAP. XXIV.

Returning to her apartment, Cecilia encountered several of the domestics hastily passing along the marble arcades; but their quick footsteps, echoing on the pavement, were scarcely heeded by her, till, on reaching the spacious vestibule, she perceived the Signora Ottavania and several other ladies environed by a group of cavaliers issuing from the door of a distant saloon.

Shrinking from the idea of being exposed to the observation of this party, Cecilia involuntarily hesitated to proceed. Her wearied spirits, already but too much agitated by the recent interview with the Marchese di Rovenza, refused to support her trembling frame with that degree of calm composure which she felt it was requisite to assume, in again meeting the haughty Ottavania; and unwilling to encounter the rude glance with which curiosity might tempt the strangers to regard her, she endeavoured to conceal herself in

the shade of one of the Colossal pillars which supported the vaulted roof of the vestibule; but ere she could effect her purpose, she perceived that the whole party were advancing in the way towards her. To attempt to conceal herself, or to recede, would now have been ridiculous, and she proceeded onwards.

The graceful elegance of her air, the beauty of her youthful form, and her white drapery, forming such a contrast to the black robes of the noble Venetian ladies, as she glided from between the massy pillars, and was crossing the chequered pavement of the vestibule to the grand staircase, instantly attracted the eyes of those she would have avoided, and exclamations of surprise and admiration were involuntarily uttered by several of the cavaliers.

Sufficiently confused by finding herself an object of such notice and such remarks, Cecilia required not the loud laugh which envy impelled Ottavania to utter, to hasten her flight. With trembling eagerness she essayed to reach the foot of the marble stairs, but her agitated feelings became too powerful for endurance, and she sunk fainting on the pavement.

When returning sensibility imparted to her a consciousness of her situation, she perceived that she was surrounded by a throng of strange countenances, and supported in the arms of the Marchese di Rovenza, whose hesitating accents informed her, as he enquired whether she was bet-

ter, that he felt not slightly interested by her indisposition.

Timidly disengaging herself from his support, she replied in acknowledgments for the polite assistance she had received, and was essaying to retire from the earnest gaze of those who surrounded her, when the marchese took her hand, and requested that she would accompany him to the saloon, where the marchesa, as yet uninformed of her transient indisposition, would be happy to receive her.

Cecilia, still unable to exert herself in offering excuses, or in declining this honour, permitted the marchese to lead her to the saloon, whither they were attended by the company, the meeting with whom had so much disconcerted her; and after having been received by the amiable marchesa with the most distinguishing marks of kindness, she was introduced to the strangers as a young lady of rank, and under the immediate protection of the marchese and marchesa.

Thus introduced, Cecilia instantly found herself overwhelmed with compliments and congratulations on her recovery from her recent swoon, attentions in which Ottavania, with sullen reluctance, joined the visitors, and who could scarcely suppress the internal rage and mortification she endured in having been compelled to do so by certain looks of the marchese, her father, who had fully indicated to his refractory daughter that he would, in this

instance at least, be obeyed. The avowed friendship and protection of the Marchese and Marchesa di Rovenza could not have failed in securing to Cecilia every possible respect and attention from their guests, even had not the latter been irresistibly attracted by the uncommon beauty and elegance of the young stranger; and therefore Cecilia soon found herself the object of admiration and complimentary adulation of a group, who, surrounding her with a thousand little polite attentions, proved by their manner how gladly they availed themselves of the opportunity of paying their tribute to charms which they had never before seen equalled.

From this scene, equally irksome and disgusting to Cecilia, she was, however, soon released by the considerative kindness of the marchesa, who, observing how unpleasantly her fair *protegée* was situated, took occasion to inform her that she was expected to join the party in an excursion to her villa on the morrow. This information was given at this moment merely to furnish Cecilia with some excuse for withdrawing from society, which the marchesa felt must be extremely disagreeable to the troubled mind of her young friend, who now availed herself of the intended kindness, and withdrew, followed by the regret of many of the cavaliers, who were captivated by her loveliness.

CHAP. XXV.

Cecilia, on entering her own apartment, threw herself into a chair and burst into tears. For some time she wept with anguish; but at length she found the oppressive emotions of her heart relieved, and, with somewhat of composure, she reviewed the disagreeable circumstance in which she was placed. Reflection, however, afforded her but little consolation. The certainty that she was to accompany the marchesa and her party to the Villa di Rovenza, seemed to exclude all hope of being able to send an answer to the letter she had so mysteriously received from her beloved mother, and this idea plunged her into the deepest affliction. That the stranger who had so much alarmed the Majordomo Caltorini, must have been the person who had placed the pacquet in her chamber, she hardly hesitated to believe; and she might have indulged the consolatory hope that this secret agent, whoever he was, would soon find some opportunity of seeing and speaking to her, had she not felt but too well assured that the necessity of her quitting the pallazo so suddenly would undoubtedly prevent any attempt the stranger might be inclined to make in the hope of being able to address her. One night longer she was, however, to continue in the pallazo; but would the stranger

judge it prudent to return so soon, after having been seen by Caltorini: of this there seemed but little probability: however, the mere surmise served to cheer the spirits of Cecilia; and, improbable as such an event appeared to be, she resolved to write her letter and have it in readiness, in case the ardently hoped for opportunity of sending it off might occur. The hour when the family should be retired to take their siesto, was that in which she now determined to write, as she could hope to be then free from all interruption.

Her mind being composed in some measure by this resolve, Cecilia suffered her thoughts to revert to her recent interview with the marchese, and its unexpected result in her introduction in such a style to the visitants now in the pallazo. As to the marchese's accusation of her having granted a midnight conference to the mysterious stranger, whom she could no longer condemn the former for having suspected to have entered the palace on her account, it was a subject which did not long engage her reflections. From the description given, she was convinced that it was not Orazio who had been discovered by Caltorini; and the figure so little corresponded with that of the terrific robber Angelo, if indeed the latter had had any concern in the affair; a circumstance which Cecilia would not, even for a moment, permit herself to suppose possible; and, of course, she concluded that the person was

wholly unknown to her. But as no further conjecture could enable her to determine as to who the man might really be, she soon turned her thoughts from the subject, and her mind became occupied by one even more important. The earnest enquiries which the marchese had made respecting the real name and former circumstances of the Signora di Berlotti were nothing more than might have been expected from a nobleman who professed himself resolved to rescue her from the perilous and mysterious circumstances in which she was involved. Cecilia could not therefore feel otherwise than grateful for the deep interest he manifested on the subject, and seriously regretted the strange necessity which enjoined her to use any reserve with him. That the marchese entertained some idea that the signora had been formerly known to him appeared evident from his expressions, on Cecilia's refusing to satisfy him as to her mother's ever having resided at Venice; and his having introduced herself as a person of rank to his company seemed to confirm the idea.

As these reflections passed through the mind of Cecilia, she found her thoughts even more embarrassed and perplexed than they had ever been before. Involved in circumstances equally mysterious and unaccountable, she knew not in what manner to judge of the singular incidents which daily occurred to her. Indeed the whole of the marchese's conduct in their recent inter-

view was such as to excite the most contradictory and agitating ideas. Fortunately for her present ease, Cecilia was soon recalled from these ruminations, so unavailingly distressing, by the appearance of Lodelli, who, the moment she entered, put to flight all her lady's reflections by exclaiming—

"O, signora! is it true that you have been fainting quite dead, and I out of the way? O, if I had not been about something very particular, I never should forgive msyelf for not being here."

"And where were you?" enquired Celia, perceiving that Lodelli's looks were full of importance, yet trembling to hear where she had been, lest she should learn some new proof of her imprudent loquacity.

"Why, I'm going to tell you, my dear young lady, if you are well enough to hear me: but you look sadly, indeed—and——"

"I am quite well enough to listen to what you may wish to inform me of."

"Well then, signora, when you went to meet his excellenza the marchese in the library, I was looking out of the lattice here that overlooks the terrace, and there was a gondola lying close under the window, and one of the gondoliers in it singing so sweetly one of those merry airs that I have so often danced to on the banks of my own dear Lake Maggiore; and so I listened with such delight, and put my head out to hear the better, and then I saw the

singer. He was a young man, signora; and I was quite ashamed when I saw that he was looking up at the window so eager and so watchful. The moment he saw me, he looked all around him very carefully, and then looking up again, he made a motion to me to come down. I shook my head angrily, as much as to say that I wondered he could ask me such a thing; but he beckoned me the more, and then it popped into my head that this might be the very person who contrived so nicely to bring you my lady's letter."

"And did you not go?" demanded Cecilia, in a voice of breathless anxiety.

"Go! why, yes, to be sure, signora. Do you think I would stop when such a thought came into my head? No, no; I made a signal that I would come down directly; and so I took a handkerchief, and let it fall out of the window, that I might have some excuse for going down on the terrace, if I met any body; but I was so lucky that I did'nt meet a soul in my way; and when I reached the parapet of the terrace, I saw the young man close by it in the gondola; and only think, signora, if the handkerchief was'nt in his hand! How lucky that was too! The wind had blown it into his boat; and so I had a fine excuse indeed for speaking; but I took care to hear what he had to say first; and so, after looking very cunningly at me for a little time, he said—

'Your name is Lodelli, isn't it?'

"Holy St. Bridget! how I was startled to hear him call me by my name. I asked him how he came to know it; but he only laughed, and then said—

'You must bring me an answer to the packet of letters left on the dressing-table of—you know who, last night, and it will be safely delivered.'

Cecilia, instinctively assured that this gondolier was the person deputed to bear the answer he sought to be entrusted with, yielded to the emotions of joy and tenderness which the certainty of being thus enabled to have her letter conveyed to her mother, and the recollection of him by whose means that beloved parent had been delivered from her powerful foe, inspired.

After some moments' indulgence of those softened recollections and regrets which stole o'er her mind, she enquired when Lodelli was again to see the young man?

"When the marchese and all the fine company are at supper, signora," returned Lodelli. "He bid me watch at the lattice for him at that time, and said he would be ready below then, and would sing the sweet tune that drew me to the window before He's a very comely-looking man, signora?"

Cecilia now directed Lodelli to watch very carefully at the appointed hour, and then expressed a hope that she had not been observed conversing with him in the morning.

Lodelli vowed that not a soul had dis-

covered her. "They were all too busy, signora, talking about the ghost that Signor Caltorini swears he saw in the vestibule last night. Did you hear about it, signora?"

"Yes," replied Cecilia, while her thoughts were engaged on another subject.

"Oh, San Marco! and is it true, signora? Was it really a ghost?"

The attention of Cecilia being now fully drawn by these exclamations, she explained to her terrified servant the suspicions she entertained that the ghost was, in reality, no other than the person who had placed the packet of letters in her room; but Lodelli, with an incredulous shake of the head, declared that could not be, as "the young gondolier was very short, and the ghost, the major-domo had declared, was the tallest figure he had ever seen."

"Did the gondolier then say that he himself had laid the packet on my table?"

"No, he did not say so, signora; that is, he did'nt positively say so; but he laughed when I asked him, and jokingly said he thought I was very curious, and then asked how I could suppose he knew it had been laid on the table, if he had not been there? Besides, signora, he could never make himself such a figure as that old Caltorini says he met in the vestibule. Why, it was as tall as almost to reach the roof, and all clothed in black, with such a dreadful plume of blood red feathers waving over its pale face—and such eyes,

signora! O, the major-domo says, its eyes were the most terrible-looking eyes that he ever saw. But do you know, signora, that scarce any of the servants will believe that he saw any thing; for they say he's always fancying that he sees some frightful hobgoblin or another, and that if they were to mind him, they should never rest in their beds for fear. There was Fabricio laughing, till he was almost in fits, at poor Signor Caltorini's whims; but Roberto shook his head, and said that he was not at all surprised at the major-domo's being so frightened at every shadow, for that nothing but a good conscience can make people courageous. Fabricio was quite angry with him for this speech, and said, that people's weakness and folly should not make them suspected of things which they never committed; and that my lord the marchese would be very angry if he knew that such unjust reflections had been cast upon his faithful servant the major-domo. And now, signora, it came out, that the marchese himself is subject to very low spirits, and sometimes fancies that *he* sees strange sights, as well as poor Signor Caltorini."

Cecilia did not listen to Lodelli with much attention until the assertion that the Marchese di Rovenza's being subject to superstitious terrors suddenly recalled to her recollection his singular looks and manner when he had made some enquiries respecting the travellers who were said to

have been murdered at the mouth of the caverns which adjoined the cottage. An involuntary shuddering seized her frame as this remembrance flitted across her mind. The unhappy persons who had perished by the hands of assassins, it was whispered, had fallen the victims of some Venetian nobleman of high rank; and although one of the men employed on the horrible occasion was said to have been taken up, yet either the influence and the power of his employer had been successfully exerted in preventing any very minute investigation of the dark transaction, or from some other cause unknown, the affair had soon sunk into oblivion. Though unable to account for the strange association of ideas which had thus connected the murder of those unfortunates with the marchese's fearful credulity on supernatural subjects, Cecilia experienced a thrilling sensation of mingled horror and self-reproach steal o'er her heart, while her memory but too faithfully represented the look of enhorrored eagerness which the countenance of the marchese wore while questioning her on the subject, and the gloomy abstraction into which he had immediately afterwards fallen. But anxious to release herself from the wild fancies which irresistibly crowded on her mind, and which, although they were involuntary, she condemned herself for feeling, Cecilia sought to withdraw her thoughts from so singular and painful a subject; and as the hour when she was

to join the marchesa and her party at dinner was fast approaching, she endeavoured to banish her gloomy ideas, by assisting Lodelli to arrange her things, preparatory to the approaching journey, and in adjusting her dress.

When Cecilia, however, found herself once more in the presence of the marchese and marchesa, and their guests, her thoughts pertinaciously returned to the remarkable and distressing suggestions which she had so strenuously attempted to repel from her mind; and as her eyes involuntarily rested on the sallow and marking features of the marchese, she mentally recoiled from the unpleasing expression which she thought she perceived to lurk beneath the smile of polite attention and complacency with with which he regarded his friends.

The observant though timid glance of Cecilia was, however, soon checked by the marchese's suddenly encountering her look; and the surprised and penetrating stare with which he for a moment viewed her would have effectually prevented her from repeating her examination of his countenance, even had not her attention been too soon engaged by the officious assiduities with which several of the strangers present endeavoured to obtain her notice.

Among those who sought to render their attentions most pleasing to Cecilia was a young signor, called Faenza, whose admiration of the marchesa's lovely *protegée* was so apparent, that it frequently drew

from Leonardo di Rovenza the most angry and repellant glances; but however unpleasing were his sensations, while observing the animated and impassioned looks of Faenza, the jealous displeasure of Leonardo appeared to be exceeded by Ottavania's, whose countenance alternately flushed and pale with internal rage and vexation, betrayed the struggling emotions of her mind, while her eyes, occasionally flashing indignant scorn, were fixed on the gay Faenza, who, seemingly unconscious that there was any other being present worthy his notice but Cecilia di Berlotti, devoted his whole attention to herself. Fain, however, would the lovely object who so unwillingly engaged his envied regards, have dispensed with them; for she had perceived the wrathful looks of Ottavania and her brother, as they were so obviously pointed that they could not be mistaken, and therefore could not fail of distressing and confusing Cecilia, whose delicate and well-regulated mind shrunk from the idea of being exposed to the rude observation with which they seemed to notice her.

From this unpleasant situation she was only relieved by the conclusion of the meal, when, on the company withdrawing into another apartment, she was addressed by a lady of the party, who held her in conversation, together with the marchese, till the moment of retiring to their respective apartments to take the siesto.

As this was the hour which, as being least liable to any interruption, Cecilia had resolved to devote to writing to the signora, she now sat down to execute this pleasing though agitating task, and endeavoured to give to her beloved mother a brief detail of all that had occurred to herself since their sad separation. This epistle, containing all the duteous respect and tenderness of filial veneration and love, Cecilia however so carefully worded as to prevent the signora from entertaining any farther apprehensions concerning the welfare and safety of her daughter; and while this lovely girl so anxiously considered every expression which might, she apprehended, betray any of the doubts and fears which she could not always avoid suffering, and which might causelessly alarm her beloved mother, tears of anxious affection and dread stole down her own fair cheeks.

Omitting not to mention the circumstance of the letter's being enclosed in an envelope containing also one signed Angelo Guicciardini, Cecilia ingenuously confessed that she had been led to conjecture that Orazio had, from some motive, thought proper to assume the name of the robber on this occasion; and she as ingenuously requested her mother's opinion on this subject, entreating the signora to write to her again as early as consideration for her own safety would permit. Cecilia did not conclude this letter, which cost her so many tears and so much heartfelt anxiety, with-

out enquiring for poor Guispardo, whom she could not but regard as a faithful friend, whose presence she rightly judged must undoubtedly be consolatory to her mother.

The setting sun, and the sound of footsteps reverberating along the corridor, informed Cecilia of the lapse of time ere she had folded her long epistle, which she now hastily did; and then, with many cautions, consigning it to the care of Lodelli, reluctantly proceeded to the saloon, where, she had been informed, the marchesa and her friends were already assembled.

The party, Cecilia observed, was much less than it had been at dinner: three ladies only remained; and these, with an elderly nobleman, called the Count Carraci, Signor Fuenza, and Leonardo di Rovenza, were now seated with the marchesa; but Cecilia had scarcely entered the room, when Ottavania followed. The same haughty ill humour characterised the features of the latter, and she was nearly on the point of encountering as much cause for vexation as she seemed to have had during dinner, from the conduct of Faenza, who, the moment he beheld Cecilia, was renewing his attentive solicitude to engage the notice of the latter, but was prevented by the marchesa, who, perceiving his design, frustrated it by placing Cecilia near herself and the lady who had entered into conversation with her after dinner.

This lady, Cecilia soon found, was a widow, and nearly related to the Count Carraci. They both appeared to be on the most friendly and intimate terms with the Marchesa di Rovenza; and this circumstance assured Cecilia that the Signora della Albina, so was the lady called, must be an estimable character, as well as the Count Carraci, her cousin. The other two ladies who were present appeared to be much more distinguished by the Signora Ottavania than by the marchesa; and their air and looks seemed fully indicative that their dispositions were in unison with that of their friend. These ladies, whose name was Bellinzetto, were neither young nor handsome: their pretensions, however, were unbounded; and as they were sisters of noble birth, though reduced fortunes, they were received at the Pallazo di Rovenza in compliment to the partiality of Ottavania, with whom they had resided in the same convent for some time.

The Signoras Bellinzetto were not quite destitute of what is called wit; that is, they possessed some talents for that species of spiteful repartee and ironical raillery which is sometimes mistaken for wit by those who delight in ridicule and ill-natured satire; and as Ottavania di Rovenza, with all the inclination in the world to mortify others by the half-laughing, half-sneering innuendo, did not possess the power, she usually contrived to draw these unamiable sisters every where with her,

that she might employ their talents for her own malicious amusement; and in this aim she generally succeeded, as her countenance and presents rendered these ladies perfectly subservient to her wishes.

After a little general conversation, the Signora Ottavania and her friends, with the Count Carraci, Signor Faenza, and Leonardo, sat down to cards, while the marchesa, the Signora della Albina, and Cecilia, remained conversing at a distant window. Could the latter have abstracted her thoughts from the many causes for anxiety and sorrow which attended the melancholy situation of her mother, she might have listened with delighted attention to the conversation of the marchesa and her friend. Intelligent and full of sensibility, these amiable women spoke with justice and feeling on the subjects they now discussed; nor was Cecilia once pained by any allusion to her own circumstances, till the Signor Faenza, impatient of his irksome confinement at the card-table, declared he could play no longer, as he found it impossible to devote the requisite attention to the game, and should therefore only perplex his fair opponents by his blunders, a plea which Leonardo also might have justly urged in excuse for the alacrity with which he threw down his cards. Ottavania sullenly assented to the breaking up of the party: she had easily perceived the motives which had actuated both the young men to decline

playing any longer, but resolved that they should have no opportunity for conversing with Cecilia, she proposed music; and as both Leonardo and the Signor Faenza were proficients in the science, no objection could be made on their part; especially as Ottavania piqued herself on her own musical talents, which, however, were even below mediocrity. The Count Carraci, who was a passionate admirer of music, heard the proposition with pleasure; and as the Signora della Albina sung with considerable taste, she also was requested to assist in the little concert. The Signoras Bellinzetto, possessing neither powers nor inclination for this fascinating science, would have been compelled to the disagreeable necessity of becoming mere hearers, had not the idea that they should now be at full liberty to make their observations on the young Cecilia, consoled them; for the Count Carraci, unconscious that the young *protegée* of the marchesa was involved in circumstances, the sad nature of which must effectually prevent her having either spirits or wish to join in the musical party, entreated her to sing, or play. Cecilia timidly excused herself for some time, but a look from the marchesa, earnestly intimating her wishes that she should do so, compelled her to yield a reluctant assent.

Ottavania and the Signora della Albina had just commenced a beautiful quartetto with Leonardo and Faenza, when the

count had obtained Cecilia's acquiescence to comply with his wish of hearing her; and when it was concluded, he importuned her to accompany himself in a duetto, which he named, and which was peculiarly adapted to display taste and execution. Cecilia took the lute he offered her, and without affectation struck the prelude, a voluntary in which the count did not attempt to join her, so transported was he with the exquisite style in which she played. To end an admiration which she felt pained by exciting, Cecilia sunk from a beautiful *ad libitum* cadence into the air of the duetto; and the count, rapturously exclaiming "bravissimo!" accompanied her; but if some of the astonished listeners were attentive admirers of her instrumental powers, nothing could exceed the amazement and delight which her vocal excellence created in the minds of Faenza, Leonardo, and the Signora della Albina, whose raptured attention, solely engaged by Cecilia, saved them from witnessing the pale glaring looks of envy and mortification which now betrayed the internal feelings of Ottavania, as, with surprise and malicious vexation, she heard the harmonious and thrilling sounds of the voice of her whom she already hated with all the enmity and rancour which the idea of finding in this unknown girl a powerful rival could excite in such a bosom as her own.

When the duetto was concluded, Cecilia hoped her painful task was over; but she

was so earnestly importuned to sing alone, that she was under the necessity of complying, to avoid the appearance of affected obstinacy. After a momentary pause of recollection, she lightly touched the symphony of a sweet and plaintive air which had been taught her by the signora, her mother; and the tender recollections which these soft and melancholy notes recalled to her mind, added to her feelings all that heartfelt sensibility which gives to expression even the power of fascination. The twilight hour, the faint breeze which the open lattices admitted into the lofty saloon, and which, while almost imperceptibly agitating the leaves and flowers of the odoriferous exotics that in gilt vases adorned the recess of the marble walls, diffused around the soothing balmy fragrance which softens the heart to excess of feeling, all combined to aid the impression which the soul-penetrating melody of Cecilia's voice produced on most of her scarcely breathing hearers.

Absorbed in silent transport, Leonardo and Faenza stood gazing on her beautiful face and form, as, with drooping head, she bent gracefully over her lute, while the Count Carraci and the Signora della Albina hung over her chair, as if they feared to lose the faintest tone of that harmonious voice which imparted such emotion to their hearts. But retired to a distance, Ottavania, and the signoras her friends, sought to conceal their envious impatience from the

observation of the marchesa, whose whole attention was, however, so deeply engaged by Cecilia, that she seemed unconscious of their presence. Meanwhile that lovely girl, with tearful, downcast eyes, breathed forth her enchanting strains; and while memory recalled the peaceful happy hours of her early childhood, became too much absorbed in the feelings such recollections excited in her heart, to be sensible of the varied sentiments with which she was at the moment regarded by all present. At length, as she softly closed the cadence which nearly ended the last stanza, she was interrupted and alarmed by hearing a deep and hollow groan uttered by some person near her, and, on looking, beheld the Marchese di Rovenza standing, fixed in an attitude of eager attention, at her side. His folded arms, haggard looks, and the wild singularity of his air, struck irresistible terror to the heart of Cecilia. The lute fell from her trembling hands, and, overpowered by the sudden transition of her feelings, she was sinking back insensible, when the marchese, starting forward, violently repelled the Signor Faenza and Leonardo, who were pressing to assist her, and frantically seizing her hand and exclaiming: "Speak to me, dear murdered angel! Oh! say indeed, that it is thee whom I behold! Oh, speak, and save me from distraction!"—fell lifeless at her feet.

Astonishment and consternation seemed for a moment to suspend the faculties of

those present. Leonardo first found power to move; and while hastily kneeling to raise the insensible form of the marchese, he faintly pronounced: "Alas! what can have occasioned the return of these lamentable fits of derangement."

Supported in the arms of his son, the marchese once more re-opened his wild eyes; and fixing his glaring looks again on Cecilia, who, pale and trembling, reclined on the bosom of the Signora della Albina, murmured in a hollow voice: "Is she already dead?—So soon!—Impossible! It is but a moment since she sung that fatal air which first enchanted my soul; and ——"

"Assist me, Signor Faenza, I entreat: assist me to bear the marchese to his chamber," cried Leonardo, in the utmost agitation: "he raves still, and delay will but increase his disorder."

Faenza instantly flew to assist Leonardo; and the marchese, again uttering the most incoherent expressions, was borne from the saloon.

During this scene, the marchesa had fainted; and although Ottavania added her efforts to those of the Signoras Bellinzetto to recover her mother from her swoon, she yielded fully to the malice of her heart in venting occasionally the bitterest invectives against the innocent Cecilia, whom she accused of having, by the exertion of her strange musical powers, worked upon the feelings of the marchese till he had been driven into madness. The artless ob-

ject of her spleen was, however, unconscious of her malevolent remarks; for no sooner had she perceived the insensible state of the marchesa, than her anxiety for that lady overcame every other emotion, and, supported by Signora della Albina, she approached the sofa, on which the form of the marchesa reclined; and her almost filial solicitude conquering the weakness of her frame, she essayed her efforts so effectually in the recovery of her amiable protectress, that she soon had the satisfaction of beholding her restored to sensibility. Ottavania, however, remained not to witness the re-animation of her mother; for the moment that Cecilia advanced towards the sofa, she muttered a vindictive expression of displeasure and scorn, and quitted the saloon.

When the marchesa was capable of speaking, she enquired anxiously for her lord; and on being informed that he had been conducted to his own apartment by his son and Signor Faenza, she sighed; and by apologizing for the confusion the marchese's melancholy infirmity had occasioned, let Cecilia understand that he was at times subject to temporary derangement; a circumstance which she now perceived was well known to his present guests.

The marchesa soon recovering in some degree her usual composed manner, the female attendants, who had been summoned by the Count Carraci to attend their lady, were now dismissed, with orders to

send in information respecting the state of the marchese.

The ladies did not long wait for the desired intelligence, as the Count Carraci and Faenza almost immediately returned and informed them that they had left the marchese much more calm, and most carefully attended by Leonardo, who was watching beside his couch with the most attentive anxiety till the arrival of the family physician should enable him to bring more favourable accounts himself.

The melancholy gloom which such a circumstance could not fail to throw over the minds of the whole party, was happily soon dissipated by the report of the physician, who, soon after his arrival, empowered Leonardo to bring them the pleasing information that the recent attack the marchese had experienced, was but slight, and that, as the marchese already gave evident signs of rapidly returning sanity, there was every reason to hope that he would be perfectly recovered by the following morning. As it was well known that the marchese's fits were never of long continuance, this account obtained implicit credit; and the marchesa, apparently in compliment to her guests, endeavoured to appear somewhat chearful, but the involuntary sadness which frequently overspread her countenance, too plainly told the internal sorrow she endured.

When the company arose to proceed to the supper-room, Cecilia would have re-

tired for the night, but the marchesa, gently pressing her hand, said—" Stay!" in a tone which implied such a wish for her to remain, that she could not do otherwise than testify her obedience.

During this meal a silence and constraint prevailed, which the gloomy looks of Ottavania, who had joined the party in the supper-room, did not tend to diminish; and as she was determined not to let the opportunity, which she imagined the present circumstances gave her of attempting to torture the artless mind of Cecilia, pass by without availing herself of it, she soon took occasion to hint at the dangerous effects which were sometimes produced by music; remarking, that nothing could be more criminal than to indulge in the monstrous vanity of displaying any extraordinary talents in the science, at the hazard of injuring those whose weak nerves and irritable feelings would not permit them to listen to without subjecting themselves to the severest sufferings.

These observations were too pointed to escape notice. The marchesa, however, fearing to draw upon the already distressed and innocent Cecilia even more bitterly implied reflections, endeavoured to change the subject, an effort in which she was most eagerly aided by the Signora della Albina, and the gentlemen present, all of whom, perceiving the malicious design of Ottavania, redoubled their attentions to Cecilia,

The repast, rendered thus uncomfortable, was speedily concluded; and the company, separating the moment they could with propriety do so, retired to their respective apartments, with no very pleasing anticipations of what the morrow might produce.

CHAP. XXVI.

When Cecilia reached her chamber, she was consoled for her recent uneasiness by being informed by Lodelli that the letter for the Signora di Berlotti had been safely delivered into the hands of the gondolier, who had been punctual to the appointed hour; and after having received repeated assurances from her faithful attendant that no person had witnessed the transaction, she retired to her couch, and dismissed Lodelli. But the soothing, tranquil slumbers which used to shed their refreshing influence o'er the pillow of Cecilia now seemed for ever banished, as each day had brought forth strange events which engaged reflection even in the hours of repose. The singular and dreadful import of the expressions which the unhappy Marchese di Rovenza had uttered, at the moment of his frantic interruption of the air she had been singing, although they might with apparent justice be attributed to the melancholy malady to which it appeared he was occasionally subject, had yet made

a deep and awful impression on the mind of Cecilia. It seemed evident to her that the air must have recalled some most interesting and agitative recollections to his memory, ere he could have been so dreadfully affected as to have been plunged by it into such a state. Cecilia trembled with horror when she considered what might have been the nature of those recollections, and the meaning of those mysterious words which Rovenza had with so much emphatic force pronounced, as all his looks and manner, at that alarming moment, seemed to speak the agonizing remembrance of some deed of darkness.

Terrifying and harrowing conjectures now arose in the mind of Cecilia, and shrinking from the contemplation of the dreadful possibility that her present protector might once have stained his conscience with the commission of some act of horror, she essayed to calm the thrilling emotions of her soul by prayer; but the morning light gleamed through the curtained lattices of the room, ere she sank into harassed slumbers, which continued to present nought but visions of trouble and terror to her imagination.

The entrance of Lodelli awakened her from the disturbed sleep which rather wearied than refreshed her; and, on rising, she found herself so indisposed, and so reluctant to meet Ottavania at breakfast, that she was on the point of directing her attendant to request, from herself, that she

might be permitted to take the morning repast in her own room; but ere she began to speak on the subject, Lodelli informed her that the marchesa desired her presence to breakfast alone with her in the private apartment of that lady, who was, owing to the shock she had received on the preceding evening, too ill to join the company still in the pallazo. Cecilia immediately prepared to attend the marchesa, for whose invitation she felt truly grateful, justly attributing this attention to her amiable protectress's considerative wishes that she should not, unsupported by her presence, be exposed to encounter the rude insolence of Ottavania.

Cecilia, who had as yet forborne to make any enquiry respecting the health of the marchese, lest she should learn that his disorder had increased—a circumstance which would have given her the greatest uneasiness, as she considered herself in some degree as the cause of his illness, was now informed by Lodelli that the marchese was so much recovered that no alteration would take place in the arrangements made for quitting the pallazo in the evening for the Villa di Rovenva, unless a return of the indisposition of the marchese should retard their departure. Lodelli would then have fain expatiated, in her curious style, on the fits, as she termed them, to which the Marchese di Rovenza was subject; but the haste which Cecilia thought proper to make in dressing, to attend the

marchesa, prevented her loquacious servant from saying much; and she was compelled to content herself with observing, that the ghost which the major-domo had seen in the vestibule had not again appeared.

When Cecilia reached the apartment of the marchesa, she experienced considerable surprise and emotion, on finding the marchese himself in the dressing-room of his lady. Cecilia hesitated to enter, and would have retired. The marchese requested her to return. She obeyed, and was presently seated on a sofa beside the marchesa, while the marchese, whose pallid and dejected looks evinced how much he had suffered, addressing her in a tone of kindness, said, in reply to the enquiries Cecilia had timidly made respecting his recovery—"The concern depicted in the expressive features of our amiable *protegée* is so flattering a proof that her wishes for the restoration of my health are sincere, that I must be ungrateful indeed, were I not sensibly pleased with the interest she feels on the subject; and I believe I cannot render my acknowledgments less acceptable by informing her, that I yesterday evening employed agents to discover the Signora di Berlotti; and as these people possess extraordinary talents for investigation, I trust we shall soon receive the wished-for intelligence that the signora may still be recoverable from the power of her enemies."

The marchese paused; and Cecilia,

struggling with the confusion which the internal consciousness of her mother's safety, and the present necessity of dissembling, occasioned her to feel, endeavoured to thank him as warmly as her fears of his succeeding in his researches, perhaps to the injury of her mother, would permit.

The marchese then politely apologised for the alarm he had given her on the preceding evening: and while, with a deep sigh, he lamented the possibility that, on some future trivial occasion, she might perhaps behold him in a similar state, he added a petition, that she would not suffer herself to be much affected by a sight which he felt convinced must be most distressing to her feelings:—"And I have been informed that I sometimes utter the most strange and dreadful expressions," he continued, observing Cecilia with a penetrating look; "but it is impossible at all times to account for the wild flights of a distempered imagination. I can, however, in the present instance explain wherefore I was last night so deeply affected." The looks of the marchese now became more pale and scrutinizing as he proceeded to say, "I had returned from the people whom I had been directing in their researches after the signora your mother. I had been under the necessity of swallowing a few goblets of wine, and my mind was already confused and disordered when I entered the saloon, where you were exerting your bewitching talents to the admira-

tion of my friends. I trembled, and scarcely dared to advance beyond the folding entrance doors; for the angelic voice which thrilled through my soul resembled that of a beloved relative, who, alas! is dead. The air, the expression, were the same. I rushed silently forward: my steps were unheeded by those who, equally fascinated as myself, were absorbed in the pleasure of seeing and hearing you. I too soon beheld you. The hour—the white drapery of your dress—your waving hair, half shading your face, and mingling with the folds of your white veil—the bending attitude, which spoke so much modesty and sensibility—all revived the idea of an image deeply imprinted on my heart, and in that instant I believed I beheld her whose perfect resemblance you then seemed; and no wonder that the recollection which then seized my tortured mind should drive me into madness; for she was basely murdered!"

The agitation of Rovenza had arisen to such a height while speaking, that both the marchesa and Cecilia trembled lest he should relapse into all the horrors of insanity. The former, hastily rising from the couch, flew to the assistance of her lord, whose fevered head rested against one of the marble pilasters which adorned the window, while his eyes were rivetted in the vacant gaze of internal abstraction.

The sound of the marchesa's voice, which, while tears, flowing fast down her

pale cheeks, impeded her utterance, was thus rendered scarcely articulate, recalled the marchese to recollection. He turned on her a look whose mournful smile expressed so much of wretchedness, that Cecilia could not refrain from shedding those tears which pity and grief for his situation excited.

The marchese perceived her emotion; he watched her in silence for a moment. Perceiving she was observed, Cecilia endeavoured to check and conceal her sympathizing sorrow.

"Oh! do not seek to quell these feelings," said the marchese, eagerly taking her hand: "the remembrance of these tears may be fixed on my heart at a moment when you may most need——"

He suddenly paused; and, earnestly pressing her hand, abruptly quitted the room, while the marchesa, attempting not to detain him, remained much agitated, and in tears.

Some few moments had elapsed after the marchese's departure, ere the marchesa or Cecilia found power to speak. At length the former turned her tearful eyes impressively on her young *protegée*, and said: "Do not, my dear Cecilia, permit the scene you have just witnessed to thus overpower your spirits. The marchese is now prepared to expect and to guard against the effects which your occasional resemblance of one who was most dear to him might otherwise produce on his mind.

Change of scene, and the gaiety which usually prevails when we are at the Villa di Rovenza, will also contribute to his tranquillity; and as he is much recovered, we shall leave Venice this evening: and now, my dear young friend," continued the marchesa, "I must enter on the subject which occasioned me the early visit of the marchese this morning; but first we will breakfast."

The marchesa led the way into an adjoining apartment, where breakfast was prepared. On the conclusion of the meal, they returned into the dressing-room; and the marchesa, being now alone with Cecilia, said: "The subject on which I am about to speak, you may not find of so much importance as your look, my young friend, seems to imply that you do at present. It merely relates to the trifling arrangements which, as you are under the protection of the marchese and myself, it is our duty to make prior to your accompanying us to the Villa di Rovenza; and first I must inform you that the marchese has given such an account of the circumstances which obliged you to accept an asylum under our roof, as is best calculated to prevent your being exposed to the curious impertinence of inquisitive idlers, and to secure you the respect and consideration of our friends; for at the same time that he has briefly stated his manner of finding you, he has positively declared

that your birth is noble; and as, in consequence, he deems it necessary that you should appear according to your rank, I am commissioned by him to request your acceptance of this casket," [here the marchesa took a very elegant one off a table that stood near her] "and to inform you that I shall take the liberty of assisting you in the choice of a wardrobe suited to your condition."

Astonishment took from Cecilia the capability of immediately replying; but when at length she recovered in some measure from her first emotions, she earnestly begged to decline the casket, which she feared might contain jewels, or some other ornaments, but consented to receive some small additions to her wardrobe, which certainly was not exactly suitable to her residence in the Pallazo di Rovenza.

The marchesa, however, peremptorily insisted on her receiving the casket; and Cecilia, fearing that any further hesitation might offend, reluctantly accepted it, after obtaining a promise from the amiable lady that she would herself select the attire which her young friend had consented to assume.

Cecilia testified her gratitude more by looks than by words; but she could not avoid obeying the impulse which impelled her to utter several expressions of regret for the trouble she occasioned, and even ventured to hint her wish that she might

have been permitted to reside in a convent till such time as the signora her mother and herself could be restored to each other.

The marchese looked keenly observant at her, as she timidly gave utterance to these wishes, and, in reply, said, "You can have no occasion to desire to remove from beneath my immediate protection, but what may result from the conduct of Ottavania; and I had indulged a hope that Cecilia di Berlotti had a mind capable of overlooking the defects of the daughter, from the consideration that her society might alleviate the sorrows of the parent."

This gentle reproof, so affectingly pronounced, penetrated the heart of Cecilia. The blush of self-dissatisfaction coloured her cheek, as falteringly she apologized for her apparent ingratitude, and sincerely assured her protectress that she was ready to encounter the severest mortifications, if, by so doing, she could command the means of lessening in the slightest degree her uneasiness.

The marchesa affectionately embraced her, and, after informing her that she was expected to be in readiness to join the party, who were to set off early in the evening, permitted her to retire to her chamber. Cecilia, however, had not long returned to her own room ere the marchesa, followed by several of her female attendants loaded with elegant materials requisite for her wear, entered.

Embarrassed and uneasy by distinctions

which she would willingly have dispensed with, Cecilia would soon have concluded the arrangements respecting her dress by a very sparing selection; but the marchesa would not permit this; and the amazed girl at length found herself in possession of a wardrobe, the variety and elegance of which was indeed worthy the spirit of the donor.

Once more alone to her reflections, Cecilia dwelt with increased emotions of surprise and bewildered conjecture on her situation, and knew not how to account for the treatment she experienced but by the supposition that the marchese must be secretly well informed as to the real rank of her family; but how far his knowledge on this subject might affect her mother, it was not possible to clearly comprehend; yet the consideration and kindness which she herself experienced seemed to imply the most friendly sentiments towards the signora.

As this idea became by reflection more firmly impressed on the mind of Cecilia, she began to think most favourably of the marchese, whose candid and affecting advertence to the murdered relative to whom she bore an accidental resemblance, prejudiced her considerably in his favour, and effectually banished all the harrowing surmises of his guilt, which had tortured her during the night. From this subject the thoughts of Cecilia again wandered to her mother—the scenes of her early days—and the mysterious circumstances which had

separated her from that revered and beloved parent; nor did these sad meditations cease till a summons to dinner ended them.

Cecilia found the same party assembled at dinner whom she had seen on the preceding day, and was met with such smiles of welcome from the amiable Signora della Albina and the Count Carraci as assured her that she already possessed some portion of their esteem and regard; an assurance which, while it gave a most pleasurable gratification to her mind, assisted in enabling her to avoid being distressed by the jealous solicitude of Faenza and Leonardo, or the still-continued ill humour of Ottavania, and the sly impertinence of the Signora Bellinzetto, her friends. But if Cecilia had some slight cause for dissatisfaction during dinner, the attentive kindness with which the marchese, who was present, and his lady, behaved to her, could scarcely fail in reconciling her to the endurance of what they could not, she knew, wholly prevent.

Nothing material occurred for the remainder of this day; and at the appointed hour the gondolas were ready to convey the marchese, marchesa, their company, and attendants, from Venice.

CHAP. XXVII.

Far different were the sensations with which Cecilia quitted the Pallazo di Rovenza from those with which she had entered it; and she now fully experienced the benefit she derived from the internal knowledge of her mother's safety, in finding her spirits freed from that heavy depression which, on her first entering Venice, had rendered her wholly inattentive to those objects which now irresistibly attracted her notice, and she ventured to gaze on the lofty marble arch of the rialto —the magnificent palaces and churches— the numerous gondolas and boats gliding along the canal, whose smooth surface, unruffled by the oars, reflected the rays of the setting sun with emotions of mingled surprise and admiration: nor was she less charmed by the distant prospects of those beautiful and varied shores and islands which almost surround the laguna. The attention of Cecilia was not, however, long permitted to rest on those charming scenes; for the Signor Faenza, escaping from the side of Ottavania, who had vainly endeavoured to secure his attendance to herself, advanced to the seat which Cecilia and the Signora della Albina occupied; and as he was perfectly well received by the latter lady, who appeared to entertain a very fa-

vourable opinion of him, he at length drew her young companion into conversation.

The Signor Faenza, with spirits elated by having obtained some degree of notice from Cecilia, indulged in a display of all the natural gaiety of his disposition, and for some time pursued a conversation which he animated by a thousand lively sallies of wit and pleasantry.

Leonardo di Rovenza, equally anxious to obtain the envied distinction of Cecilia's attention, possessed not, however, the lively talents of his friend; and, although he had contrived to be near her, he sat a silent and internally mortified listener to a discourse in which he could not join; but he had the good sense to perceive that she seemed to regard Faenza with modest indifference, and that she seldom spoke but in reply to something said either by the Signora della Albina, or the Count Carraci.

Meanwhile Ottavania, and her inseparable friends, the Bellinzettoes, seated at a distance, indulged the mean propensities of their nature in a multiplicity of invidious remarks and innuendoes; and the marchese and marchesa were so deeply engaged on some interesting subject, which in low yet earnest tones they were discussing, that they were totally unobservant of the rest of the party.

At length the marchese was the first who disturbed the arrangement of these little groups, which he did by informing the Signor Faenza that the marchesa wished

to converse with him for a few moments. Faenza most reluctantly arose to attend the summons of the marchesa; and the marchese immediately took possession of the seat he now left vacant.

The presence of the marchese gave a different turn to the discourse. He introduced serious and interesting subjects, and gave the now exulting Leonardo opportunities of displaying considerable taste and knowledge on various topics.

From this moment the marchese scarcely quitted the side of Cecilia during the whole of the little voyage, which, however, was not of very long continuance, the Villa di Rovenza being situated but a few miles up the Brenta.

It was nearly dark when the party disembarked. Carriages were found in waiting to convey the company to the Villa di Rovenza, which stood about half a mile from the banks of the river. A long and shady avenue, leading up a gradual ascent, was swiftly passed through, and the airy porticoes of the edifice soon became visible by the clear moonlight, which discovered its marble walls and pillars. Lights from the interior glittered at intervals between the luxuriant foliage of the high shrubs and trees that skirted the lawn; and, on a nearer approach, several domestics appeared with torches under the front portico, awaiting the arrival of the carriages.

Though few of the beauties of this charming place could be seen by Cecilia

at such an hour, yet the elegant architecture of the villa, the dark outline of the waving woods and heights which extended far behind it, and the soft murmur of a fairy torrent, that rushing along its craggy bed, mingled with the flowing waters of the Brenta, and now glittered in the bright moon-beam, together with the rich fragrance of the orange and lemon groves, added to the perfume of a thousand flowers and shrubs whose dewy essence scented the calm air, soothed all her feelings, and enchanted her senses with a combination of objects, to which imagination added new charms; for sufficient was perceptible to give the most pleasing ideas of what was yet to be beheld.

The interior of this villa was not calculated to disappoint the expectations which the approach to it had excited. The folding entrance doors opened from the portico into a noble hall, the pavement of which exhibited a beautiful mosaic of green and white marble: alternate pillars of the same supported a lofty dome, from which was suspended by chains of green and silver three resplendent lustres of curiously cut glass, which reflected in innumerable glittering hues the lights with which they were illuminated.

The form of the hall was an octagon. Four sides were occupied by large folding-doors, which, except the front entrance, were entirely of glass. Those on two opposite sides were open, and admitted par-

tial views of the light and elegant saloons to which they belonged. The door opposite the entrance led further into the interior of the building through another hall of smaller dimensions than the first, and was surrounded on three sides by the corridor of the upper apartments; while the fourth was occupied by a pair of folding-doors, opening into a long marble arcade, and two broad flights of marble stairs, ornamented with balusters of gilt bronze, and illuminated by gilt lamps, impending from between the marble pillars that supported the corridor.

From the front hall, the marchesa and her guests proceeded into one of the saloons, where they found an elegant and luxurious collation prepared. The *coup de œil* of this apartment was striking. Cecilia, who was the only one of the party who beheld it under the advantages which novelty is said to confer, viewed it with admiration.

The saloon was entirely of white marble; the pure and glossy surface of which was adorned with the most exquisite sculpture, representing festooned wreaths of laurel, the lively green of which, contrasting with the polished white of the marble, added animation to beauty. Large windows, reaching from the floor to the ceiling, admitted from beyond the colonade a moonlight view of the lawn, the Brenta flowing at its sloping foot; and the outline of thick woods and groves, from

amidst whose luxuriant foliage, partially visible as the bright rays of the moon fell on the white domes or turrets, appeared the neighbouring villas that extended along the river's banks. From a transient glance towards the prospect the eyes of Cecilia again contemplated the interior of the saloon. The elegantly festooned window curtains, the covers of the sofas and chairs, were of white satin, richly embroidered with green and silver. The two extremities of the apartment displayed ranges of white marble vases on silver tripod stands, and containing the most rare and odoriferous plants, both exotic and native. Superb lustres, silver lamps and branches, diffused an animated and brilliant light around, and fully displayed the masterly paintings which adorned the concave ceiling.

The tasteful arrangement of the elegant and varied repast next engaged her attention; but it was the chearful hilarity which began to pervade the countenances, even of Ottavania and her friends, that could not fail to impart to the artless mind of Cecilia a considerable degree of satisfaction. She suspected not that the Signora di Rovenza's good humour proceeded from the attentions which Faenza, piqued with her own indifference, now thought proper to pay to Ottavania; and, unconscious of the cause, she began to indulge a hope that the haughty insolence of the latter might subside, while surrounded by the unrestrained and elegant gaiety which the

marchese declared should distinguish their stay at the villa. The spirits of the marchese during supper were, indeed, considerably elevated: he talked more than usual; spoke of balls and fetes, and seemed to regard his son with particular marks of satisfaction. Seated near Cecilia, and attentive only to her slightest look, Leonardo scarcely perceived a difference in his father's manner, which was usually reserved and commanding towards himself; but now, whenever the marchese addressed him, there was so evident a condescending kindness in his tone, that at length even the young Rovenza could not avoid noticing it. This circumstance of the marchese's behaviour to Leonardo did not, however, seem to create any jealous emotions in the mind of Ottavania, who seemed to lose, in the delight she received from Faenza's assiduities, every other feeling. Indeed, before supper ended, her silly exultation, and the looks of triumph which she sometimes directed towards Cecilia, at length suggested to the latter that Ottavania was most partial to the Signora Faenza, and she immediately resolved to repress the slightest attention that he might ever seem inclined to pay to herself; a determination by no means disagreeable for Cecilia to make, as the modest timidity of her disposition at all times inclined her to shrink from the idea of being an object of notice. As to the distinguishing good nature with which the marchese so singu-

larly behaved to his son, Cecilia attributed that to his probably having perceived some pleasing alteration in the manners of Leonardo, who now, indeed, appeared to be a most tractable and complacent character.

Almost immediately after supper, the marchese, apologising for his abrupt departure, bade his adieus for the night; alleging, in excuse for his early retiring, a slight indisposition and fatigue.

To the surprise of Cecilia, all the chearful hilarity which had so agreeably animated the little party while supper lasted, seemed to vanish with the marchese. The placid smile languished on the features of the marchesa; conversation soon became broken and uninteresting, and each person seemed pleased when the hour of retiring gave them a plea to break up a party no longer pleasing or enlivening.

CHAP. XXVIII.

Cecilia, as she was conducted to the elegant apartment appropriated to her use, could not forbear observing the splendour which on every side met her view:—statues, paintings, gilding, and all the concomitants of wealth and taste, richly adorned the halls and galleries through which she was led to her room.

Her conductresses, two female domestics

of the villa, omitted not to point out to her notice the most rare and striking pictures and ornaments; and Cecilia mentally promised herself much future satisfaction in the examination of some of the paintings, many of which were by the first masters of the Italian and Flemish schools. But amidst all this splendid profusion, the recollection of the unhappiness of the illustrious possessors of so much magnificence and wealth, arose to the mind of Cecilia, with the conviction that grandeur is, indeed, insufficient to create content or peace, and therefore not to be envied.

On reaching the apartment assigned her, she found that it was perfectly correspondent with those she had already seen—tastefully superb and elegant A bedchamber, dressing-room, and an oratory beyond the latter, comprised the apartments. Pale rose coloured silk hangings, sofas, chairs, ornamented with the same materials; lofty mirrors, tapestried carpetings, representing the most beautiful flowers, alike adorned the dressing room and bed-chamber, while, surrounding the bed, at a small distance from it, were affixed from the ceiling to the floor wide shades of transparent gauze, which, while intended to guard the lovely sleeper from the intrusion of those insects which the warmth of an Italian climate but too often renders obnoxious, excluded not the air, nor concealed the magnificent bed, the

flowing silk curtains, drawn back and festooned with tassels, nor the elegant decorations which otherwise adorned it.

The pensive eye of Cecilia glanced mournfully around the apartments: she thought of her mother; and the sigh which swelled her heart, assured her that she could not enjoy, or scarcely admire, those splendid scenes when that dear parent was not present.

From the dressing-room the officious attendants eagerly led Cecilia into the oratory. The walls of this small room were exquisitely painted in religious subjects, each side representing a different scene: on one, the penitent Magdalen prostrate at the feet of the Saviour after his resurrection.

This piece was of the most sublime and affecting nature: astonishment, awe, adoration, and the troubling rapture at beholding her Lord, indeed, arisen from the grave, were admirably depicted in the lovely countenance of Mary Magdalen, while her attitude, and the tears that appeared to pause on her cheek, seemed to tell that the pangs of a contrite heart were suspended by the conviction of that wondrous truth which forms the foundation of our faith and of our hopes; while the looks of her divine Master, beaming all the mingled majesty and benignity of omnipotent love and mercy, pronounced pardon and peace to the penitent!

Cecilia, devoutly pious, contemplated this admirable painting with feelings such

as the reverential recollection of the great event to which it alluded alone can inspire. When one of the attendants called her attention to another picture, she turned with reluctance from viewing the first, while she mentally aspirated a fervent petition to heaven, that the wounded heart of guilt might ever experience that sincere repentance is, indeed, an acceptable sacrifice. She then directed her looks to the painting which the domestic had pointed out as worthy her observation: it was a fine representation of the nativity. The figure and countenance of the Virgin, as, with awakened emotions of maternal love, she bent over the divine infant, sleeping on her lap, was characteristic of all that chastity, modesty, and tenderness, which distinguished her nature. Tears almost obscured the sight of Cecilia as, while gazing on the holy family reclined on straw, surrounded by the unconscious animals who shared with *such* guests the rustic manger, she tremulously exclaimed: "Oh, pride, this is a scene which should become the object of thy contemplation, that the soul of arrogance might be subdued by such a lesson of humility!"

"Ay, ay, signora mio," now exclaimed Lodelli, who had followed her lady and the two attendants into the oratory, "such humbling lessons are badly enough wanted by some people, I believe; for if ever there was a proud, ill-natured, good-for-nothing thing, it is that——"

"Be silent, I command you," interrupted Cecilia, whose pious reflections were effectually checked by the exclamation of her imprudent and loquacious servant, and her own fears that Lodelli's words alluded to Ottavania.

"Why, dear me, signora, I wasn't going to say any harm--I was only going to——" Cecilia, more terrified, looked extremely displeased; and Lodelli, now completely silenced, stole out of the oratory; while her lady, thanking the attendants for the trouble they had taken, dismissed them both.

Cecilia remained for some time alone in the oratory. Her devotion, ardent and unstudied, soon calmed the perturbation of her spirits; and when she entered her chamber, she felt herself much more composed than she had hitherto been; yet she found herself under the necessity of assuming a serious gravity of looks and manners, in the hope that such an indication of disapprobation would be the means of rendering Lodelli more circumspect for the future. But this was a veil with which the ingenuous Cecilia could not long conceal her native sweetness; for, on perceiving the tears stealing down the cheeks of her faithful attendant, who, silent and sorrowful, seemed to feel the reproof in her heart, she spoke in a tone of unfeigned kindness, and dissipated the troubles of Lodelli by a declaration of forgiveness; nor could she forbear a smile, as the whimsically-

turned features of the young woman changed their expression from grief to joy. Lodelli had indeed a countenance perfectly calculated to produce risibility in those who took the trouble to examine it. There was such an arch, laughing expression in her lively black eyes, her nose was so comically turned up, and her broad, dimpled cheeks, and usually half open mouth, gave such an idea of mingled cunning, good nature, and simplicity, that few who had observed her had ever mistaken her disposition. Her figure was as grotesque as her face, being short and rather clumsy; and if poor Lodelli could boast of any attractions, they certainly consisted in her eyes and the black curling hair which hung over her forehead. Such had been the effect of her appearance on the marchese's household, that they had already singled her out as a fit object for their mirth and ridicule; but as Lodelli did not want for some portion of discernment, she had soon discovered their intentions. The Signora Ottavania's women had been foremost in this design. Lodelli had quarrelled with them, in consequence; and it was to the principal attendant of the signora that she had alluded, when she so abruptly interrupted the remarks of Cecilia in the oratory.

Cecilia was no sooner made acquainted with this circumstance than she peremptorily commanded Lodelli to avoid all further altercation with any of the domestics.

"And am I to stand by like a fool, signora, when I hear your name taken up in such a manner?" was Lodelli's reply and question.

"You must not provoke people to use my name," said Cecilia, mildly.

"Provoke, signora! Why, it was they that provoked me. I'm sure I would bite my tongue through and through before I would provoke any body to say such wicked things. Why, do you know, signora, that that vile Ursula, Signora Ottavania's chief woman, began it all by saying that her young lady would be sure to charm all the fine elegant signors and cavaliers that will be visiting here, in spite of the arts of any cunning young upstart from the mountains, that his excellenza the marchese chuses to bring into his family, and make such a fuss about. Ay, signora, and she said: 'It's well if my lord marchese don't repent it soon,' for that the signora was taken in already by she knew who. Well, signora, I could'nt be such a fool as not to know who she meant, and I did give it her nicely in return. I let her know that you——"

Shocked at having been made the subject of such a dispute, Cecilia had scarcely power to check Lodelli's volubility, which at length, however, she did, by a positive command that she should never again trouble her with such accounts. She then dismissed Lodelli with a reiterated command

to shun all further conversation with any of the domestics.

This circumstance, although considered by her as below her attention, was, however, sufficiently explanatory of the sentiments with which Ottavania regarded her; for Cecilia could not doubt but that Ursula's insolent remarks were merely the echo of her lady's observations. This conviction determined Cecilia to maintain the utmost reserve in her manners towards both Leonardo and the male guests of the marchese, as by such a conduct only she could hope to evince to Ottavania that the desire of attracting admiration was, indeed, foreign to her nature. At length the almost unceasing anxiety of her mind was suspended by the approach of sleep, and on this night Cecilia enjoyed the luxury of undisturbed repose.

CHAP. XXIX.

On the following morning she again met the usual party at breakfast. She was received by the marchese and marchesa with distinguishing kindness; and, to her extreme astonishment, Ottavania addressed her in a style equally polite and friendly. This latter circumstance affected the artless mind of Cecilia with varied emotions; for as she now contemplated the animated features of the Signora di Rovenza, and

listened to the tone of her voice, which, although evidently affected, was still soft and obliging, she could hardly imagine how it was possible for any human being to assume an appearance of so much amiableness, when their real character was so opposite. Such, however, was the case. Cecilia, with a sigh of deep regret, was forced to acknowledge this to herself, and she could now only wonder what motive could have induced Ottavania to adopt the present system of dissimulation.

After breakfast, the marchesa mentioned her expectation of being visited by several families in the neighbourhood in the evening: Ottavania spoke of the party with sufficient indications of approving pleasure. The marchese testified an almost equal degree of satisfaction; but Leonardo looked grave, and was silent.

The marchesa soon proposed to walk, and, leaning on the arm of Cecilia, led the way to the luxuriant orangery, which was formed into walks, shaded from the warm sun-beams by the umbrageous canopy of intertwined branches that extended along the alleys; but lovely as were the vista prospects, this amusement soon tired, and the company separated to prepare for the party expected in the evening. The Signora della Albina, who appeared perfectly indifferent as to the pleasures which the gay concourse might bring with them to the villa, remained with the marchesa and

Cecilia, till a message from the marchese compelled his lady to leave them.

The signora, with a friendly freedom which pleased her young companion, now proposed shewing the latter some parts of the villa, which she had not as yet seen; and her offer was gratefully accepted by Cecilia, who acquiesced more in thankfulness for the polite intention of amusing her, than to gratify a curiosity which she did not feel.

The signora conducted her through a multiplicity of elegant rooms, till they came to a remote apartment situated on the same side on which those of Cecilia were.

"This room is really a noble one," observed the signora: "it is a pity that the marchese will not permit it to be used."

Cecilia surveyed the room with attention. The furniture was costly, and in every respect it equalled those apartments she had already seen. After glancing her eyes on some of the paintings which adorned it, she enquired why the marchese had thought proper to prohibit the use of this room.

"That is a question impossible to be answered," returned the signora, "as the marchese has never deigned to give any reason for this curious interdiction; but although this room is never used, it is, you may perceive, very carefully preserved. Superstition might pronounce it haunted; but it is never locked up; and

who would think of a ghost in a room that was not locked up?"

Cecilia smiled at the raillery of the signora, but she could not forbear remarking that the room had somewhat of a gloomy aspect.

"Why, I think it has," said the signora, looking around her. "This room," she added, "once formed the suite of the apartments which you now occupy, my young friend. Look," she continued; "this door (and she approached one) "opens into the oratory." The signora then threw open the door, and Cecilia followed her into the sacred recess. The attention of the latter was instantly rivetted by the sudden view of the window of the oratory, which, on the preceding night, she could not observe. It was high, and the Gothic arched frame contained a casement, on which was painted in glowing colours, and evidently by a masterly hand, a striking representation of the crucifixion.

Cecilia gazed for a moment on the awful scene, now rendered doubly impressive by being illuminated by the full blaze of the sun, which added to the brilliant colouring of the stained glass. Trembling, awe-struck, full of pious humility, sorrow, love, and veneration, she ventured not long to look intently on that tremendous scene. Her eyes, dimmed with tears, now fell on the altar beneath the window. It was covered with black velvet: an image of the Virgin, an hour-glass, and a *memento*

mori, with an open prayer-book, were placed upon it.

Fain would she have enquired who had occupied the apartments prior to herself; for the sight of the *memento mori* implied that some person had been engaged in penitential devotion whenever they had visited the oratory.

The signora spared Cecilia the trouble of enquiries, by expressing her own surprise at the view of the skull and cross-bones. "It is very singular!" exclaimed the former: "It never could have been placed there when the rooms were used by——" And here the signora suddenly checked herself, on perceiving the look of anxious attention with which Cecilia was observing her. After a momentary pause, the signora seemed to recover from her transient confusion; and looking on her young companion with a mildly-serious and impressive glance, she said—

"My very blameable curiosity and inadvertence has betrayed me into an error which might be injurious to you, if not timely informed that the most disagreeable consequences might result from making enquiries relative to any mystery perceivable in the family or residences of the marchese. Circumstances have occurred to him in his life, to which, although many years are past, he cannot bear the slightest reference; and therefore in pity to the feelings of one, whose virtues are predominant over his weaknesses, those subjects

are carefully avoided by his friends: his domestics, of course, dare not revert to them. You, amiable Cecilia, are doubtless wholly unacquainted with those events; and, as such is the case, exposed to the too probable danger of wounding his feelings by some unconscious observations or enquiries, which may better be avoided, permit me then to take the liberty of a friend, and gently caution you to be reserved, even on the most trivial points. You will pardon my freedom, and the seeming ambiguity of my expressions, should you ever learn to what I allude."

Cecilia warmly testified her grateful acknowledgments for the signora's hints, and promised to remember them.

"And now we will leave this place," said the signora, sighing and looking mournfully around.

They then proceeded to the dressing-room; and the signora almost immediately after retired from the apartments of Cecilia, leaving the latter a prey to new conjectures; but as conjecture never satisfied the mind of Cecilia, she essayed to repel its misleading influence, by directing her attention to the lovely views which the windows of her apartments permitted her to behold. Both the dressing-room and chamber commanded a south-east aspect. The prospects were varied and extensive. The groves of orange, lemon, citron, and myrtle, which almost encompassed the villa, filled the warm air with refreshing

fragrance. Cecilia, while she lingered at the open lattice, almost forgot her cares, as her delighted eyes roved over the luxuriant scene. The distant vineyards—the extended plantations of the glowing mulberry—the dark olive, tall groves of palm, chesnut, cedar, cypress, and pines, from amidst whose lofty shade, pavilions and villas, seated on the wooded uplands, and which were partially discoverable, alternately engaged the contemplation of Cecilia; but her attention was at length wholly fixed on a small temple, the marble columns and dome of which, overshadowed by majestic plane trees, were so much concealed by the surrounding groves, that she had not at first observed it. This light and elegant structure appeared to belong to the Villa di Rovenza; for it stood on the summit of the eminence, on the side of which the villa was erected. The situation of the temple seemed to promise even more enchanting prospects than those she had already beheld, and she resolved to visit it as soon as a proper opportunity should occur. Charmed, however, as was Cecilia with the rich and varied country, yet sighs of regret mingled with her emotions of pleasure: she remembered the lovely scenes of her earliest days; and, as imagination contrasted the luxuriant and sublime shores of the Lago Maggiore with the present prospect, she turned aside and wept.

A train of mournfully-tender ideas now

rushed on her heart; but from the indulgence of the distressing, yet sadly pleasing emotions which they excited in her mind, she was prevented by the necessity of preparing to meet the family at dinner.

None but the usual party were assembled at this repast. Chearfulness and good-nature seemed to be still the prevailing humour of the marchese, his family, and his guests; and had not Cecilia been already acquainted with the real characters of some present, she might have believed them as amiable as they appeared to be happy.

CHAP. XXX.

The expected visitors arrived at rather an early hour in the evening, and were received by the marchesa in a spacious and magnificent saloon, which commanded a full view of the Brenta, and of the numerous parties which were beginning to assemble on the luxuriant banks of the river, all eager for pleasure, and seeking the enjoyment of it in all the delights of music, the dance, the promenade, or the conversation group.

This was the first time that Cecilia had ever found herself in such a crowded assembly; and although supported by the avowed friendship and attention with which the marchese and marchesa distinguished

her, she yet experienced a degree of timidity and restraint which she could not conquer. Her beauty, which could scarcely receive addition from the advantages of dress, was so striking—the graceful modesty and elegance of her person and air so impressive and attracting, that she soon found herself an object of general curiosity, admiration, and attention. The marchesa had introduced her to her friends as a young lady of noble birth, and every person present became anxious to discover to what family she was related; but as decorum forbade all importunate enquiries, they were obliged to rest satisfied with the idea that her rank and connexions must indeed be exalted, as she seemed to be regarded by the Marchese and Marchesa di Rovenza with so much friendship and respect.

From the painful examination to which she was exposed, Cecilia was at length relieved, when the elegantly-illuminated saloons and gardens were thrown open to the company, some of whom preferred the charms of music, in the cool and airy pavilions, to the attractions of play. Cecilia, however, remained almost the whole of the evening by the side of the marchesa, who never engaged in any of the amusements of chance, to which she latterly had an extreme dislike; and thus her young companion became secured from the importunate attentions of many gentlemen, who seemed anxious to address her. The

situation of Cecilia permitted her also the advantage of being at liberty to attempt to form some opinion of the gay assemblage by which she was surrounded; but her inexperience, and the simple ingenuousness of her disposition, prevented her being capable of discerning those seemingly trifling traits, which betray, in some measure, to the eye of discrimination some part of the real dispositions of most people. Leonardo di Rovenza, however, would have fully informed her of the characters of almost all who were present; but, in consequence of her previous resolution to repel his assiduities, she affected so cool a reserve towards him, that he would soon have been compelled to retire from her in despair, had not even the marchese called him aside, and, in a low but authoritative tone, commanded him to abstain from any particular attentions to the young Signora di Berlotti for the remainder of the evening. Leonardo bowed a reluctant obedience, and, struggling with his surprise and vexation, flew to kill reflection at the gaming-table.

The command of the marchese, directing the absence of his son, had not been delivered in so under a tone as to escape the ear of Cecilia, who, imagining that the latter had perceived how much she had endeavoured to avoid the attentions of Leonardo, attributed the marchese's ordering him away to a polite wish of contributing to her ease. The marchese's motive for so doing was, however, very different. At

all events, the circumstance was peculiarly pleasing to Cecilia. But while this lovely girl, undazzled by the novel splendour which surrounded her, shrunk with timid delicacy from the gaze of admiration, Ottavania di Rovenza displayed alternately the most coquettish airs, and the boldest levity of manners:—a levity which, while it frequently caused the blush of displeasure and confusion to rise on the pale cheek of her mother, was yet sanctioned by the approving smiles of the marchese, who beheld, in the uncommon conduct of his daughter, only the exuberance of high spirits, animated by the gaiety of the scene. Ottavania, however, still continued to treat Cecilia with the apparent good-natured familiarity which she had adopted in the morning; but the latter could not help fancying that she discerned a faint and supercilious sneer mingling with her hypocritical smile.

The generous and noble mind of Cecilia recoiled from the appearance of intimacy with such a being. Most ardently did she sigh for the arrival of that hour which might restore her to the arms of that affectionate parent, who had ever taught her to consider dissimulation as one of the meanest and most degrading vices. Disgust and dissatisfaction soon assailed her heart, and her eyes wandered over the brilliant scene without encountering one object which could either amuse or interest her, till the marchesa, who was now joined by several

ladies, proposed visiting the gardens, where a few select groups were entertaining themselves with music and walking.

The mind of Cecilia was now soon calmed by the soothing influence of the sweet and plaintive melody which resounded from the portico of a pavilion at one of the extremities of the gardens; and as she drew nearer to the sounds, she distinguished that they were repeated by an echo, whose soft reverberations, replying to the harmonious voices of the singers and the dulcet tones of the instruments, produced the most charming effect.

The marchesa, and the ladies who had accompanied her into the gardens, paused in their walk to speak to some gentlemen who met them at the turning of the path, which at this spot terminated in an oval space, in the middle of which was a marble fountain surrounded by tall cypress-trees. The effect of the water, as it rose in a shining column to a considerable height, and returned into the spacious bason, reflecting the brilliance of innumerable lamps, and glittering amid the dark and waving branches of the cypress-trees, was so beautiful, that Cecilia, while the marchesa was conversing with the group they had met, lingered to observe it. The gentle dashing of the fountain, mingling with the melodious strains of the music, combined to aid the pensive sadness of her heart; and for some moments she was unconscious that she no longer heard the

voices of the marchesa and her friends. When, however, she recovered from her transient reverie, she found herself alone on the brink of the fountain. An involuntary tremor seized her frame; but soon ashamed of suffering so trivial a circumstance to affect her in such a manner, she essayed to recal her composure, and instantly looked around to discover the path the marchesa and her companions had pursued. Her perplexity and uneasiness returned, on perceiving that four shaded alleys, which, however, were partly illuminated, terminated around the space in which the fountain was placed. Unknowing which direction the marchesa had taken, she could not decide which alley to enter, and was on the point of trying to return to the villa, when the Signor Faenza, suddenly emerging from one of the walks, perceived her. Starting, and uttering an exclamation indicative of surprise and pleasure, he addressed her, by enquiring whether he could be of any service, as he observed she appeared distressed and embarrassed.

Cecilia replied, by informing him how she had missed the marchesa; and, after a momentary pause, he requested permission to conduct her to that lady.

Cecilia did not positively decline his offer; but she evinced her reluctance to accept of it, by requesting him to merely direct her to the walk which the marchesa had taken. Faenza could not exactly say

which, but he presumed it must be the one leading to the pavilion; and he again entreated permission to attend her thither. She now perceiving that, should she any longer hesitate to suffer his attendance, she should only expose herself to a thousand importunities, therefore timidly assented, and he immediately conducted her into one of the covered walks. The alley was not of any considerable length, and as they proceeded, the music was now more clearly heard.

Cecilia expressed a hope that it would terminate near the pavilion. The Signor Faenza said that was not the case, as they must traverse several others ere they could reach the pavilion, the paths leading to which were very circuitous. The walk seemed wholly deserted, and Cecilia mentally regretted that she had ventured into it. Suddenly the music ceased. An idea that the party might be leaving the pavilion occurred to her. She mentioned her conjecture, and begged to be conducted back to the villa. The Signor Faenza assured her that she was mistaken: they often paused, he said, to select new pieces. He represented that, as she was now just at the termination of the walk, it would be better to proceed to the pavilion than to return. His polite and respectful manner induced Cecilia to assent to their proceeding, and in a few moments they quitted the walk, and entered the winding path of a small wilderness, composed of the most

beautiful groves of myrtles, laurels, rose-trees, and a variety of other shrubs.

"We shall but ascend the path to yonder summit," said Faenza, "and then shall reach the pavilion."

The wild loneliness of the path—the few lamps, but thinly scattered amid the dark foliage—and the air of desertion which prevailed around, struck Cecilia with a terrific sense of her own imprudence and impropriety in accompanying a stranger to such a spot. She paused, and declared she must return. She could not perceive the features of the Signor Faenza; but she could easily comprehend, from the tone of his voice, that he did not approve her declaration. He begged her to ascend a little higher, and assured her she would then behold the lights in the building. Cecilia, fearing to betray her own alarms, proceeded a few paces onward, and she then indeed plainly distinguished the brilliant lamps entwined around some pillars, which she imagined to belong to the portico of the pavilion. With quickened steps she now pursued the path, and in a few minutes found herself at the summit of the eminence, and at the foot of the marble steps of the lonely temple she had so much admired from the window of her apartment.

The indignant consternation into which she was plunged by this discovery, could only be exceeded by her terror and amazement. For some moments she was inca-

pable of replying to Faenza, who, now bending on his knee before her, was eagerly imploring her pardon, and beseeching her to attribute the deception he had used to the excess of that passion which had impelled him to seize the present, and perhaps the only opportunity he might ever find of conversing with her alone, or of assuring her that he could not live without her. He then proceeded to request her permission to apply to the marchese, or any other friend she should name, whose approbation might be necessary to their union.

This curious and confident declaration and request restored Cecilia to recollection, and instantly perceiving the necessity of repelling his advances with calm firmness, she endeavoured to conquer the agitation and terror of her mind; and without deigning to reply to his speech, she demanded to be instantly conducted to the villa.

"Not till you have pronounced my pardon, and afforded me some sweet assurance that I may hope to obtain your favour, can I consent to your leaving this spot, enchanting and lovely Cecilia!" said Faenza; and catching the corner of her robe, he attempted to detain her, as, with a sudden motion, she endeavoured to fly down the path.

"Release me, signor, I command!" cried the still more alarmed Cecilia, seeking to disengage her drapery from his rude

grasp: "you cannot imagine that such base and dishonourable conduct should incline me to hear you."

"Charming Cecilia! impute this conduct to the force of those feelings which devour me. Say but that you pardon me, and will permit me to hope, and I will instantly attend you to the villa."

"Suffer me to go hence, and then I will pardon you," returned the trembling Cecilia.

"And you will be mine?"

"Yours! never! Unhand me, signor! How can you presume to treat me thus? [struggling to release her hand, which he now seized] The Marchese di Rovenza will highly resent this insolence to one under his protection."

"Lovely, angelic girl! can you suppose that the fear of the marchese's indignation —the indignation of the whole world, could deter me from availing myself of this opportunity of pleading the ardent passion with which you have inspired me? No! Let all the powers of earth combine to threaten me with even more than mortal vengeance, still would I not desist. Urge me not then to despair, lest the impetuosity of my feelings should drive me into madness."

"Insolent absurdity!" exclaimed Cecilia, while, animated by contempt and indignation, she made a sudden effort to disengage her hand from his, and succeeding, rushed past him with the swiftness of

lightning towards the path leading back to the villa: but her flight was vain; Faenza, instantly recovering from the emotion of surprise which her precipitation had occasioned him, pursued, and quickly overtaking the trembling fugitive, caught her in his arms, and, unmindful of her piercing shrieks, hurried her back, and bore her up the steps of the light colonnade that surrounded the temple.

The temple, of a circular form, was entirely open. The cupola, which rose in the middle, was supported by a circular range of Corinthian columns. Wreaths of laurel were festooned between the columns, and from these were suspended the coloured lamps which illuminated the temple.

On passing the colonnade, Faenza released not the now almost fainting Cecilia from his embrace; but scarcely had he reached the interior of the temple, than a loud and thrilling voice was heard to exclaim—"Ruffian, forbear!" and in the next moment a tall gigantic figure rushed forward from between the opposite pillars, and ere Faenza could reply to this unexpected intruder, the trembling form of Cecilia was torn from his arms, and himself hurled, by the athletic arm of the stranger, down the steps of the colonnade, and from thence he fell headlong amidst the thickly entwined shrubs that clothed the almost perpendicular precipice on which the temple stood.

Cecilia had fallen on the marble pave-

ment, but she had not fainted; and as she now turned her grateful looks on her deliverer, and feebly assayed to rise, she discovered in the lofty form that stood beside her the robber Angelo. The long black cloak he now wore was thrown open, and the dreadful implements of death—the glittering dagger, the cimeter, and enormous pistols, were fully visible; while the scarlet plume that waved in his cap and o'ershadowed his brow, seemed to add a deeper gloom to the wild ferocity of his looks, which were now fixed on Cecilia with an expression of the most severe enquiry.

The mingled emotions of wonder, terror, and gratitude which at this moment struggled in the bosom of Cecilia, were powerful almost beyond endurance. Angelo seemed struck by her agitation: he seized her cold and trembling hand, and raised her from the chilling pavement. She was nearly incapable of motion, and was compelled to support herself against one of the pillars, while Guicciardini, in hollow and impressive accents, articulated — "Imprudent Cecilia! could'st thou not stand the test of temptation for so short a space of time!—Could'st thou not resist the artful voice of flattery that lured thee here to meet destruction? Speak," he added, in a tremulous tone, "and say, how camest thou here?"

Cecilia was on the point of replying: her trembling lips were opened to vindicate

herself from those suspicions which, even in the robber Angelo, she felt were degrading to her name, when she was prevented speaking by hearing the sounds of several loud voices, which proclaimed some persons approaching the temple.

Angelo wildly started. He cast a hurried and ferocious glance around, and then directing a look of terrific meaning towards Cecilia, he muttered, in a hollow whisper: "Mention but the name of Angelo Guicciardini as your preserver, and your ruin is inevitable. Be silent, as you value the lives of your mother and yourself."

"My mother! Oh, I implore you, tell me! Say, what of that dear parent?" cried Cecilia, with almost frantic eagerness, but the robber was already gone: he had fled precipitately from the temple; and, in the next moment, Leonardo di Rovenza, followed by Ottavania, and a number of the visitors, rushed up the steps of the colonnade.

"There! behold her, she is here!" exclaimed the Signora di Rovenza, in a tone of mingled malice, anger, and exultation, as she pointed to the almost lifeless form of Cecilia, who, pale, agitated, and motionless, again reclined her head against one of the pillars. In an instant the lovely girl was surrounded by the groups who had entered, and now found herself supported by the friendly arm of the Signora della Albina, who, in a voice of earnest

entreaty and anxiety, demanded wherefore she had strayed so far from the frequented parts of the gardens.

Cecilia faintly articulated a scarcely audible explanation of the accident which had divided her from the marchesa and her party, and then gave a brief account of the conduct of the Signor Faenza, concluding by saying she had been delivered from the insolent importunities of the signor by the appearance of a stranger, who had driven him from the temple.

Leonardo, enraged by this detail, flew off in search of Faenza, while Ottavania, with a loud, insulting laugh, cried: "Truly, the Signora Cecilia's tale is most charmingly romantic; but it would be infinitely more to her advantage, had it been distinguished for its veracity."

"And who shall doubt my veracity, signora?" demanded Cecilia, amazement and indignation inspiring her with a transient gleam of spirit.

"Who!" retorted Ottavania, in a voice of angry surprise: "every person present; for they must suppose you voluntarily accompanied the signor hither."

"That is a point which the Signora Cecilia does not dispute," observed the Count Carraci; "but she was led to do so by the mistaken confidence that she placed in the honour of the Signor Faenza, who declared he would conduct her to the pavilion."

Again Ottavania laughed spitefully;

but ere she could make any further malicious remarks, the Signor Faenza came limping into the temple. His whole appearance was very much deranged, but his countenance exhibited no marks of uneasiness or vexation. Every eye was fixed upon him as he entered. He looked round and laughed, and with an air of perfect *non-chalence* cast a glance on Cecilia; and then, affecting a look of ludicrous gravity, contemplated his own figure, and, with a shrug, drawled out—

"I'm in a most woeful plight, it is true; and if ever I indulge in the frolic of running away with a peerless virgin again, I hope I may encounter as formidable a knight as the horrible one devoted to the service of the Signora Cecilia di Berlotti." And now, with a ridiculously piteous look, he attempted to kneel at the feet of Cecilia, who knew not how to fly from this scene of insulting mockery, but instantly starting back, he exclaimed: "It won't do—I am so confoundedly crippled that, by my life, signora, I cannot—I cannot bend my knee with reverence due to solicit your pardon; but I will have the honesty to acknowledge that I deserve your resentment for having so foolishly drawn you hither; but, in fact, when I met you alone in that retired walk, I could not resist the ardent desire which seized me to find out how young and peerless maidens look and behave, when some terrible enchanter carries them off to his castle in the clouds,

and there makes love to them; and this was my sole motive for conducting you to this solitary and elevated spot. I must confess that my expectations and hopes were more than answered; for I not only had the gratification of beholding in you all the fears and disdain which spotless damsels of old were famous for on like occasions; but lo! when I was on the point of releasing my captive princess, her true and valorous knight appears, and, without deigning me an honorable challenge, seized me with an iron-handed grasp, and sends me headlong amongst the thorns and briars which compose the *chevaux-de-freize* boundary of this my temporary castle; and, *certes*, I should have instantly plunged into the horrible gulph below, had not a friendly tree checked my fall. Here I lay entangled for a moment, cursing my silly head for engaging in such an adventure, till my curiosity to discover who was my gigantic rival enabled me to scramble from among the bushes; and although I was lame, and knew not but that some flying dragon, or divers other monsters, fierce as the one I had already encountered, might oppose my return, I stole back to the steps of the colonnade, but was only in time to hear him say something about his name being Angelo, and to see him vanish like a ghost on hearing the voices of the party now assembled in the temple, which was, indeed, a most uncommon prank for a *knight* to play, as he should, with all

due loyalty, have staid, and faced the enemy."

The ludicrous turn which Faenza had thus given to his behaviour to Cecilia might have led some of the company to imagine that he had really been in jest, had not the very pointed admiration which he had betrayed, even from the first moment of his having seen her, rendered his assertions dubious; but as he now threw aside his raillery, and made a very serious apology for his conduct—and which apology was received by Cecilia, no further notice could be taken of the affair; and as she was now sufficiently recovered from her perturbation to quit the temple, the company decided to return immediately to the villa, many being eager to learn who this mysterious knight would prove to be; for as none but the Marchese or Marchesa di Rovenza were entitled to question Cecilia on the subject, hopes were entertained that they would make some enquiries in their presence, and thus afford an opportunity for the gratification of curiosity.

CHAP. XXXI.

In their way to the villa the whole party was met by the marchesa and several other ladies. At the sight of Cecilia this amiable lady, who had suffered considerable uneasiness while the latter was missing,

flew towards her young *protegée,* and while she testified the joy she felt on again beholding her, discovered, by her enquiries, that she was still a stranger to the recent adventure.

A whimsical account of the affair was now given to the marchesa. Cecilia, by no means desirous of placing it in a more serious point of view, endeavoured to smile; but when the marchesa eagerly enquired who was the person that had so singularly come to her relief, the confused girl hesitated, and was under the necessity of entreating permission to be silent on that subject. The marchesa secretly condemned herself for having as yet asked the question, and instantly granted the request of Cecilia; adding, with considerate attention to the name of her young friend—"You will tell me then in private who is this knight of wondrous prowess."

At this moment the Marchese di Rovenza appeared, followed by his son. The looks of the marchese were sufficiently severe and indignant, but the eyes of Leonardo sparkled with fury when they encountered the Signor Faenza.

An explanation instantly took place; and an ample apology on the part of the Signor Faenza to the marchese prevented all danger of disagreeable consequences.

To the surprise of every one present the marchese did not ask Cecilia a single question relative to the affair.

The company now returned to the villa,

where an elegant collation awaited them, and did not separate till the light of the dawn warned them to retire.

Cecilia withdrew for a few hours to her chamber; but her reflections on the occurrences of the evening were but too well calculated to banish repose from her pillow. The singular and sudden appearance of the robber Angelo in the temple was a circumstance almost beyond credibility, and his motive for being there incomprehensible. The recollection of his strange promise of protection to herself was now revived with impressive force in her mind. In the recent instance he had undoubtedly fulfilled that promise, by saving her from the insults of Faenza; but how to account for Angelo's being near at such a moment, seemed wholly beyond her power. The manner in which he had treated Faenza implied an earnest intention of serving her, and yet she could not possibly conceive wherefore a man of such a character, and of such pursuits, should run all the hazard of encountering the danger which might attend his having ventured into the gardens of the Villa di Rovenza on such a night, merely to watch over and guard her. The horrible profession of Angelo Guicciardini might be supposed to render his presence repeatedly necessary in the haunts of his desperate bands, and therefore nothing could be more extraordinary than his lurking about the villa, unless, indeed, his so doing might be attributed to some latent

design against herself, or proceeded from an intention of plunder. The former surmise seemed the most consonant to probability. Cecilia now started in affright. Angelo had warned her in the most impressive manner not to mention *his* being the person who released her from Faenza. It was true he had also enforced his caution with the alarming threat that the lives of both her mother and herself might pay the forfeit of her breach of silence; but the latter intimation might possibly have been given merely to ensure her observance of the taciturnity which, from some secret motive, he wished her to maintain.

What might be that motive, Cecilia mentally asked herself, while, with shuddering horror, her fancy now accused Angelo Guicciardini as the author of all the misfortunes which, from the moment of his having entered the cottage, had overwhelmed her mother and herself with so much trouble and affliction; for who could be a more proper agent for the mysterious Count de Weilburgh than the robber Angelo. The recollection of all the opinions formed by the Father Ascollini and the Marchese di Rovenza relative to Angelo and the young Orazio—their repeated assertions that perhaps both were the agents of the Count de Weilburgh, now rushed on the mind of Cecilia, and were mingled with the terrific conviction that these conjectures were just. The promise of protection from Angelo—the tale of Orazio's

noble birth, and even the visit of the pilgrim, now appeared to the harrowed fancy of Cecilia but as so many evidences that both Guicciardini and the latter were indeed the agents of that mysterious and dreadful foe, who had torn her beloved parent from their peaceful and happy home, and driven herself to seek protection and security from the bounty of strangers. The casket of jewels she had been presented with by the pilgrim, appeared, however, to give some contradiction to the alarming fear that now overwhelmed her; but Cecilia was not in a frame of mind to conclude herself in error from the recollection of that circumstance. The jewels, she thought, might be false, and bear only an accidental resemblance to some once belonging to some friend of her mother's, and might have been presented to her merely to further some secret schemes of the count. Plunged still deeper and deeper in dread and woe by considering Orazio as one of the artful agents of her own and beloved mother's inveterate foe, she soon believed that the letter she had received from the signora, if not a mere forgery, was at least a false account of her situation, that she had possibly been compelled to write, in order to give the count an opportunity of ensnaring herself into his power, and of facilitating her removal from the protection of the Rovenza family, by inducing her to place a mistaken confidence in those apparently em-

ployed to secure some correspondence between her mother and herself.

Nearly distracted by the indulgence of a train of reflections of such fearful import, she bewailed, with feelings of the deepest mental anguish, the unaccountable and fatal credulity which she imagined had so long blinded her to the truth; and in the first effervescence of her wild, enanguished regrets, she resolved to acquaint the Marchese di Rovenza with every particular that she had hitherto withheld from his knowledge; yet the fear of encountering the indignant surprise which he might express, on a discovery of her former strange reserve, soon made her abandon her intention, and determine first to consult the marchesa. Consoled by the hope of being enabled to repair, in some degree, the error she believed she had committed, Cecilia found her spirits more composed, and as the sun was already risen, she quitted her couch, and retired into the oratory, where she continued for some time to implore the guidance and protection of the Most High.

When she had concluded her devotions, she proceeded to her dressing-room, in order to take out of a cabinet the casket of jewels given her by the supposed pilgrim. The casket, however, was not to be found in the cabinet; and after an unsuccessful search for it among her clothes, she was compelled to wait till Lodelli made her appearance. A short time elapsed ere the young woman entered; and when she

did, her look and manner were so wild, that Cecilia started on beholding her, and, in the utmost alarm, enquired what had occurred to throw her into such a state of perturbation.

"Enough, signora—enough, I'm sure!" was Lodelli's almost breathless reply.— "Why, what an escape you had last night from that terrible robber Angelo Guicciardini! I didn't suppose that you would have let me go to bed without telling me any thing about the matter!

With trembling eagerness, Cecilia demanded how Lodelli had learned that she had seen Angelo.

"Why, signora," she replied, "I accidentally overheard Signor Faenza telling his excellenza the Marchese di Rovenza all about it. They were both in the little room that has a small grating in the door which opens into one of the arched stone passages that leads to the servant's hall. That grating was made on purpose for listening, I do verily believe. As I was passing just now, I thought I heard somebody speaking your name, signora: and as it was the name of my own lady, I thought, to be sure, there would be no harm in listening a bit; for I wondered who could be talking of you, signora. So I stood on my tip-toes, and peeped in through the grating; and who should I see in the little empty room but the marchese and the Signor Faenza, who was looking so pale and so spiteful, and spoke so fast all the time: said

"But what did he say?" almost unconsciously articulated Cecilia.

"Why, he said, signora—no, the marchese said, 'Are you certain, signor, that the stranger called himself Angelo Guicciardini?' And then the signor swore, with a great oath, that he was sure, and told him that he knew that the person who had come to you in the temple last night was the famous robber Angelo; but that he would not say so before all the company; and then, signora, this wicked man advised the marchesa by all means to turn you out of the villa; for he was sure you could not be a proper person, when you was acquainted with Angelo Guicciardini."

"And what reply did the marchese give to this advice, Lodelli?" faintly enquired Cecilia.

"He said he would *consider* of it, my dear young lady; and then he thanked that spiteful signor, and begged him not to say any thing about the affair to any one else; and so he promised that he would not, and they then came towards the door to come out; and I ran away as fast as I could, to tell you. But, pray, signora, what did that terrible Angelo say when—"

Lodelli was here interrupted by one of the female domestics of the villa entering to announce to Cecilia that the marchesa requested to see her immediately.

END OF VOL. I.